



Doctorate in Educational Psychology (DEdPsy)

An Exploration of Multi-Professional Practice Working with Young People who
are At Risk of Becoming Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) in
Wales: Implications for the EP profession

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Summary

This document is divided into three sections. Part A consists of a literature review that explores the background and current research surrounding YP who are at risk of becoming NEET. The first half includes a narrative review which aims to provide a summary of the historical, political and social context of the NEET agenda. Included within this section is a discussion about the definition of being NEET, current prevalence, psychological underpinnings and an overview of current preventative and responsive support. The second half includes a systematic literature review which aims to critically evaluate what current EP focused research has found is important to supporting YP who are at risk of becoming NEET.

Part B is the empirical study which aimed to explore how YP in Wales who are at risk of becoming NEET are supported by multi-professionals and how this could be enhanced. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with three different professional groups who were recruited from four different LAs in Wales. The interviews sought to explore what is currently working and how could support be improved, as well as considering how EPs could be further involved. Part B includes the methodology, outcomes and discussion in relation to these research questions.

Part C contains a critical appraisal of this thesis, including an analysis of the research journey and the decisions made. This section will also address how this research contributes to current knowledge. Further exploration will be offered about the methodology, theoretical assumptions, participants and recruitment, data analysis and how the researcher intends to disseminate the results.

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Abbreviations

ACE – Adverse Childhood Experience

ALN – Additional Learning Need

ASSIA – Applied Social Science Index

BEI – British Education Index

CASP – Critical Appraisal Skills Programme

CDP – Critical Discursive Psychology

CLA – Child Looked After

CYP – Children and Young People

EBSA – Emotionally Based School Avoidance

EET – Education, Employment or Training

EP – Educational Psychologist

DfE – Department of Education

EHCP – Education, Health and Care Plan

EMA – Education Maintenance Allowance

ERIC – Education Resources Information Centre

ESF – European Social Fund

EWO – Education Welfare Officer

FE – Further Education

FSM – Free School Meals

IPA – Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

LA – Local Authority

NEET – Not in Education, Employment or Training

ONS – Office for National Statistics

PA – Personal Advisor

PCR – Person Centred Review

PRISMA – Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses

PSE – Personal Social Education

RPA – Raising Participation Age

SEU – Social Exclusion Unit

SFR – Statistical First Release

SREC – School Research Ethics Committee

TEP – Trainee Educational Psychologist

WoS – Web of Science

YEPF – Youth Engagement Progression Framework

YEPFC – Youth Engagement Progression Framework Co-ordinator

YP – Young People



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Part A: Literature Review

Word Count: 11,700

1.0 Structure of Literature Review

This literature review will take the form of two parts. The first consists of a narrative review which aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of the historical, social and political background of young people (YP) who are categorised as Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). This will be followed by a discussion of the psychological underpinnings, with a particular focus on the application of Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Finally, there will be an outline of the responsive and preventative support currently offered to YP.

The second part will comprise of a systematic literature review that sought to explore current Educational Psychologist (EP) focused research and what this has identified as important for YP who are at risk of becoming NEET. Considerations and implications for EP practice are drawn from the outcomes. This section will conclude with the rationale and research questions for the empirical study.

2.0 History of Employment for Young People

The introduction of the 1870 Education Act in the UK saw the beginning of compulsory education and attendance at school until the age of 11 (The Education Act, 1870). Over the next 145 years, legislation has gradually Raised the Participation Age (RPA), with the most recent change being set out in the Education and Skills Act (2008). This included a compulsory requirement for all YP to be engaged in some form of education or training until the age of 18 (Education and Skills Act, 2008). This move by the UK Government aimed to increase the numbers of YP leaving education with adequate skills and qualifications to take into employment (Hutchinson, Beck, & Hooley, 2016). However, it has not been universally welcomed and it is argued that for YP who have disengaged from education, this may lead to further disconnection whilst also limiting opportunities for them to enter employment (Arnold & Baker, 2013; Hutchinson et al., 2016). Further consideration of having diverse education, employment and training (EET) choices, both pre- and post- 16, are discussed in section 6, 7 and in Part B.

Over the twentieth century, the way employment is constructed has also changed (Arnold & Baker, 2013; Patton & McMahon, 2014). According to one definition, “employment” is simply; “the fact of someone being paid to work for a company or organisation” (Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, n.d.). However, in recent years vocabulary such as “career”, “vocation”, and

“occupation” are now more widely used to describe job choices (Arnold & Baker, 2013; Patton & McMahon, 2014). According to one definition, “career” can be explained as; “a job for which you are trained and in which it is possible to advance during your working life, so that you get greater responsibility and earn more money” (Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, n.d.). These examples help to illustrate the expectation that YP now face transitioning into the world of employment, to participate in something that has progression and responsibility (Patton & McMahon, 2014). It is argued that focus is no longer just about being in employment, but it is about having a job that is meaningful (Patton & McMahon, 2014).

The profile of jobs and their distribution has also continued to evolve, as evidenced by Hicks and Allen (1999) who demonstrate that the percentages of professional groups between 1911 and 1991 have changed substantially (see Table 1).

Table 1

Distribution and percentages of professional groups in 1911 and 1991 (Hicks & Allen, 1999).

Job Type	1911 (%)	1991 (%)
Professional	1	5
Managerial and technical	13	32
Skilled	37	34
Partly skilled	39	22
Unskilled	10	6

As the options and paths available to YP when they leave compulsory education have altered (Arnold & Baker, 2013; Hutchinson et al., 2016), so have the challenges. Previous generations of YP left education at a younger age and would be successful at gaining work despite a lack of qualifications (Thompson, 2017; Social Exclusion Unit, 1999). However, with an increasing focus on academic achievement and skills in either education or training, YP now require more before entering the adult world of employment (Hutchinson et al., 2016). A report written by the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) (1999) on behalf of the UK Government stated; “For this generation, and for young people in the future, staying at school or in training until 18 is no longer a luxury, it is becoming a necessity” (SEU, 1999, p. 6).

Perhaps as a result of these changes, YP now have a multitude of different post-16 options including sixth form, college or training providers (Arnold & Baker, 2013). Another popular option is apprenticeships which can offer YP a training wage, alongside learning skills and gaining qualifications (Arnold & Baker, 2013; Mason, 2020). Despite a recent increase in apprenticeship offers from employers across the UK, competition for these places can be high and opportunities for YP who have not acquired adequate qualifications prior to leaving school can be limited (Arnold & Baker, 2013; Mason, 2020).

Despite there being more choices for YP post-school, many researchers have argued that the transition from youth to adulthood is now more prolonged, complex and unpredictable (Brynnner & Parsons, 2002; Canny, Green, & Maguire, 2001; Robertson, 2019). YP are required to navigate this developing and multi-faceted world, and for those who are already disengaged with education, this may increase the risk of failing to make a successful transition from school (Canny et al., 2001; Salisbury, 2004).

2.1 Social Exclusion

The ability for YP to make this successful transition from school to further EET has been identified as being an important safeguard against social exclusion and a means of ensuring better pay and employment prospects in later life (Pemberton, 2008; SEU, 1999). Getting lost or failing to transition into a post-16 destination has been viewed as one of the key predictors of social exclusion in the UK (Yates & Payne, 2006). Social exclusion has been defined as:

...a complex and multi-dimensional process. It involves the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas. It affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole. (Levitas et al., 2007, p. 9)

Comparatively, being in employment is seen as a protective factor as a European Commission White Paper 'A new Impetus for European Youth' states;

To have a job means adult status, self-respect, money, independence and the opportunity to broaden one's social contacts. Young people who are cut off from work are losing a vital chance to get new perspectives and to integrate into wider society (European Commission, 2002, p. 49).

3.0 The NEET context

In the UK, YP who had been unsuccessful transitioning into EET following school were first identified and measured in South Wales in the mid-1990s (Rees, Williamson, & Istance, 1996). The definition of being *NEET* started to surface and was made a formally recognised term in the *Bridging the Gap* report by the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) in 1999. This report claimed to identify, measure and understand YP aged 16-18 who got lost during the transition between school and the workplace and recognised that those who became NEET were at greater risk of social exclusion and remaining long-term unemployed (Maguire, 2015; Sergi, Cefalo, & Kazepov, 2018; SEU, 1999). The terminology also aimed to encompass YP who did not fit under a previous definition of 'youth unemployment' which ignored those who continued into further education (FE) or training (Furlong, 2006; Maguire, 2015). In the report NEET was defined as: "those 16-18 year olds who neither participate in education or training nor have a job (for at least 6 months during this period)" (SEU, 1999, p. 15).

What followed was a stronger focus in government policies to retain these YP in EET and help to support their transition into the workplace (Sergi et al., 2018; SEU, 1999; Yates & Payne, 2006). The use of the NEET label is now widely used across many EU countries, with the age range generally being between 16-24 years (Furlong, 2006; Maguire, 2015; Sergi et al., 2018). The Office for National Statistics (ONS) only began to report on the numbers of YP who are classified as NEET in 2013 indicating that the monitoring of this group is a relatively new concept (ONS, 2013).

3.1 Is it a helpful definition?

There has since been much debate about the usefulness of NEET as a definition (Furlong, 2006; Maguire, 2015; Sergi et al., 2018; Yates & Payne, 2006). Some issues that researchers have highlighted are below:

- The definition ignores the diversity and complexity of YP and defines them as NEET regardless of whether they are long- or short-term unemployed, temporarily sick, acting as a young carer, pregnant, traveling, etc (Furlong, 2006; Sergi et al., 2018; Yates & Payne, 2006). These varying groups of YP will need different forms of support and intervention yet the definition of being NEET could be argued to encompass them all under one umbrella (Furlong, 2006; Yates & Payne, 2006).

- The definition does not discriminate between YP making voluntary or involuntary decisions about their engagement in EET (Simmons & Thompson, 2011).
- It ignores YP who might be in precarious and short-term job conditions, underemployed or on unpaid traineeships which could also be reflections of vulnerabilities to social exclusion (Furlong, 2006; Sergi et al., 2018).
- The definition is negatively viewed and is constructed as only encompassing risks and disadvantage, when for some this might not be the case (Maguire, 2015; Sergi et al., 2018; Yates & Payne, 2006). This has been argued to lead to stereotyping and further discrimination of NEET YP, for example stereotyping their attitudes and engagement with EET (Maguire, 2015; Yates & Payne, 2006). Researchers have claimed that this negative perception has influenced and guided government policies (Maguire, 2015; Yates & Payne, 2006).
- Monitoring the numbers of YP who are NEET is problematic as current measurements are often static, despite fluctuations across the course of a year (Pemberton, 2008). YP are rarely continually NEET and the definition does not take this into account (Audit Commission, 2010; Hutchinson et al., 2016).
- It lacks a universally agreed definition, which makes it difficult to compare internationally, and has been argued to make things difficult when holding governments to account over supporting these YP (Furlong, 2006).

Despite these legitimate shortfalls of the definition, it continues to be a way of increasing awareness and maintaining focus on supporting YP (Furlong, 2006). Counterarguments claim that the definition can reduce further marginalisation of certain YP, for example, young mothers which without the definition of NEET would be described as unemployed or inactive (Furlong, 2006). Despite arguments that it groups diverse YP into one homogeneous group, the definition ensures that government policies continue to address that many NEET YP have vulnerabilities that require support and acknowledgment (Furlong, 2006). For YP who fall into the NEET category, even if only for six months, has been argued to be an effective predictor of future disadvantage (Furlong, 2006).

3.2 Types of NEET

Research has attempted to address the critique that the NEET definition ignores the diversity and complexity of individual YP's situations (Spielhofer et al., 2009). Spielhofer and colleagues conducted interviews with 120 YP who were classified as NEET and attempted to segment their individual attributes and motivations. As can be seen in Table 2, there were argued to be three distinct categories with varying distinguishing characteristics; 'open to learning NEET', 'sustained NEET' and 'undecided and NEET' (Spielhofer et al., 2009).

Table 2

Three sub-categories of YP who are NEET (Spielhofer et al., 2009)

Type of NEET	Prevalence	Distinguishing characteristics
Open to Learning	41%	Often the most highly qualified Positive school experiences Most likely to re-engage
Sustained	38%	Often the least qualified Negative school experiences Least likely to re-engage
Undecided	22%	Often achieved some qualifications Mixed school experiences More likely to re-engage in the medium to long-term

Although these results are the outcome of just one study, it helps to highlight that the group of NEET YP are not homogeneous and that different responses and support strategies will be necessary to support effective re-engagement (Audit Commission, 2010; Nelson & O'Donnell, 2012; Spielhofer et al., 2009).

3.3 Length of time being NEET

Acknowledgement should also be made to the length of time that YP are NEET, as temporary periods may not necessarily be an indicator of vulnerability (Furlong, 2006; Yates & Payne, 2006). Data from approximately 24,000 participants identified that 25% of YP would experience being NEET at some

stage, however for most YP this would not last longer than six months (Audit Commission, 2010) (see Table 3).

Table 3

Percentages of the length of time NEET YP remain in this category (Audit Commission, 2010)

Length of time classified as NEET	Percentage
Up to a week	2%
Between one week and a month	9%
Between one and three months	25%
Between three and six months	21%
Six months or more	43%

This helps to demonstrate that not all YP who enter the NEET category may require additional support, with some YP temporarily between EET opportunities, awaiting the next one to start (Bryner & Parsons, 2002; Audit Commission, 2010).

3.4 The adopted definition

For the purpose of this thesis, the definition of NEET will be adopted due to the frequency of its use within the literature to define the group of YP this research intends to encompass. It is acknowledged that the definition is not perfect and accepted that a significant limitation is the lack of specificity about what, if any, vulnerabilities and risks YP may face as a barrier to engage in EET (Furlong, 2006; Simmons & Thompson, 2011; Yates & Payne, 2006). The definition is used throughout this thesis with the understanding that there are different “types” of NEET YP and the support they need will differ (Audit Commission, 2010; Spielhofer et al., 2009). To address YP who might be vulnerable to social exclusion and long-term disadvantage, the outcomes of this research are aimed to apply to those out of EET for at least 4 weeks, not including any time delay whilst waiting for an EET provision to begin (i.e., over the summer break). The measures of prevalence will be taken as the forms they are in within the UK context, whilst accepting that these numbers may not be comparable across other international countries.

The adopted definition of being NEET has been taken from the ONS (2020). This definition states that a YP aged between 16-24 years “who is not in any of the forms of education or training listed

and not in employment is considered to be not in education, employment or training (NEET)” (ONS, 2020). The ONS (2020) also includes that “a person identified as NEET will always be either unemployed or economically inactive” (see Table 4).

Table 4

Adopted definitions of education, employment and training from the ONS (2020)

Form of Engagement	Criteria
Education and Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are enrolled on an education course and are still attending or waiting for term to start or restart. • They are doing an apprenticeship. • They are on a government-supported employment or training programme. • They are working or studying towards a qualification. • They have had job related training or education in the last four weeks.
Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are in paid work or who had a job that they are temporarily away from (for example, because of holidays or sick leave).
Economically Inactive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are not in employment but do not meet the internationally accepted definition of unemployment because they have not been seeking work within the last four weeks and/or they are unable to start work in the next two weeks.
Unemployment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They do not have a job and have been actively seeking work within the last four weeks and are available to start work within the next two weeks.

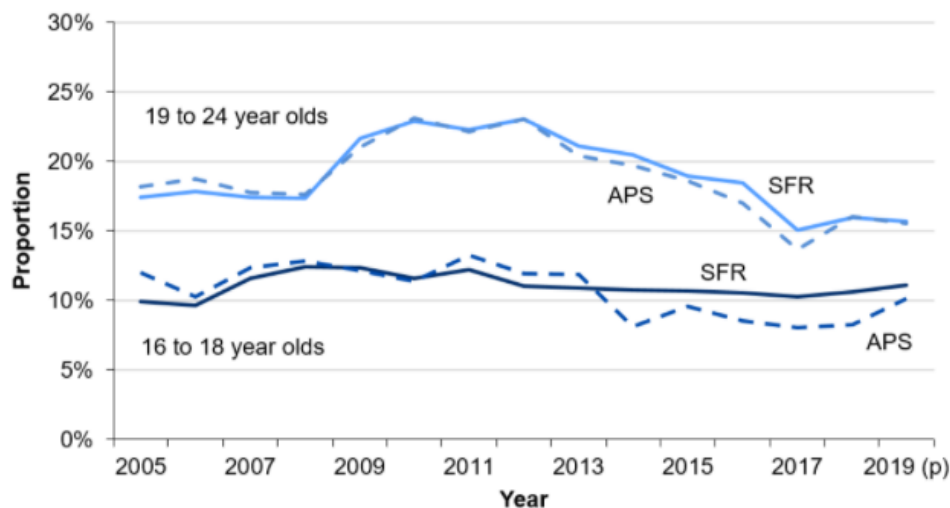
3.5 Prevalence

The large majority of YP leave secondary school and transition into various EET positions however according to the ONS, there are currently estimated to be 757,000 YP (aged 16-24) who are classified as NEET in the UK (ONS, 2020). This is estimated to be around 11% of all YP (ONS, 2020). Out of these it is estimated that 55.5% of these YP were not actively seeking EET (ONS, 2020).

In Wales, different methods are used to collect and track the numbers of YP who are NEET. Using the Statistical First Release (SFR) data, most recent figures suggest that at the end of 2019, 11.1% of 16–18-year-olds (11,200 YP) and 15.7% of 19-24-year-olds (38,500 YP) were NEET (Welsh Government, 2020) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

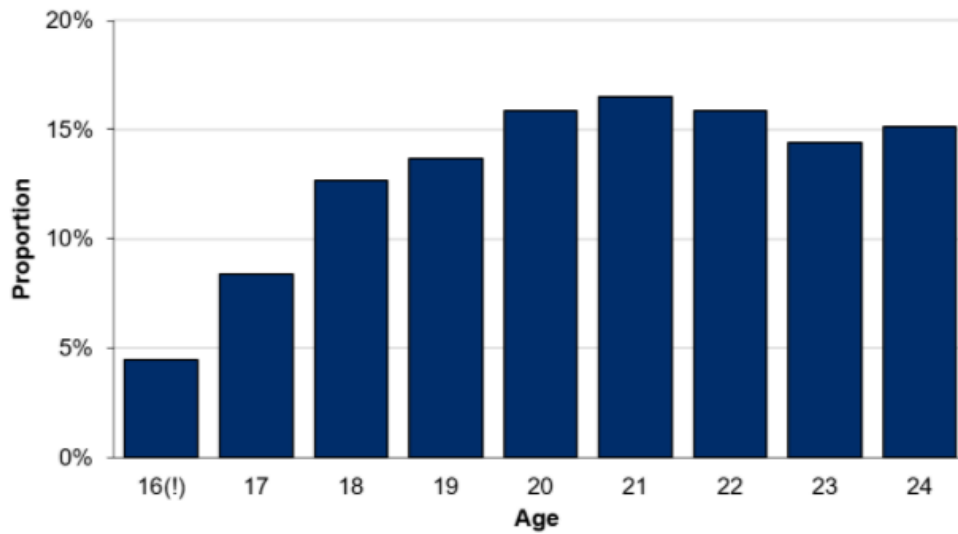
Young people not in education, employment or training in Wales, 2005 to 2019 (Welsh Government, 2020)



The likelihood of becoming NEET appears within the statistics to increase with age as the percentages increase from 4.5% aged 16 to 16.5% aged 21 as can be seen in Figure 2 (Welsh Government, 2020). It has been argued that a ballooning of different education options has had a positive impact on the number of NEET YP aged 16-18 (Audit Commission, 2010; Maguire, 2020).

Figure 2

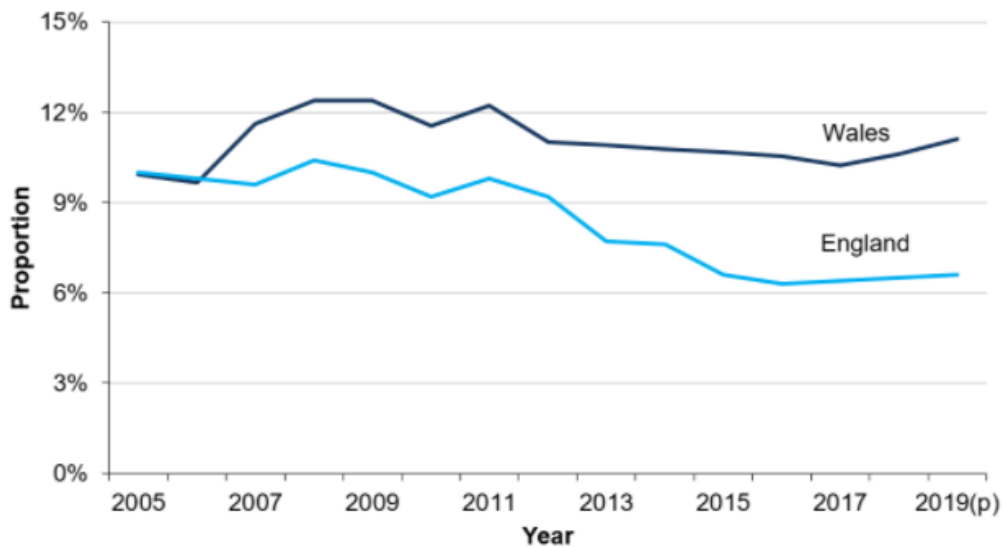
*Young people not in education, employment or training in Wales by age, March 2018 to March 2020
(Welsh Government, 2020)*



Generally, it is difficult to cross compare the percentages of YP who are classified as NEET across the four nations of the UK due to differences in the methods of measuring and reporting these numbers (Mirza-Davies, 2013). However, comparisons can be made between England and Wales for the prevalence of NEET YP aged 16-18 (see Figure 3). It is important to note that the levels of NEET in Wales have been higher than the UK average since 2007, raising questions about why this might be the case (Welsh Government, 2020).

Figure 3

Young people not in education, employment or training aged 16 to 18, Wales and England, 2005 to 2019 (Welsh Government, 2020)



3.6 Who is at risk of becoming NEET?

To be able to provide informed, appropriate and effective intervention and support for this group of YP then the diversity of needs should be understood (Arnold & Baker, 2013; Hutchinson et al., 2016; Maguire, 2015). There are many risk factors that have been recognised as potentially contributing to a YP becoming persistently NEET, including a breadth of social, family and school influences (Arnold & Baker, 2013; Gabriel, 2015; Mirza-Davies, 2013).

Negative early life experiences have been identified as a predictor of later NEET status, including Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) which have been linked to an increased risk of dropping out of high school and remaining long-term unemployed (Metzler et al., 2017; Pitkänen et al., 2021). ACEs are described as any traumatic or harmful childhood event that occurs before the age of 18 but is remembered by that person throughout their adulthood and can have long-term negative effects on development (Taylor & Barrett, 2018). Socioeconomic status, receiving free school meals (FSM), lack of parental interest in education and being a child looked after (CLA) have also been found to be highly linked to NEET status later in life (Arnold & Baker, 2017; Brynner & Parsons, 2002; Pitkänen et al., 2021). Therefore, it is important to consider the impact of early adversity and life experiences for YP in order to provide effective support (Metzler et al., 2017).

Other research has also identified social and educational factors, including YP who regularly miss periods of school, have an Additional Learning Need (ALN) or leave with poor qualifications prior to age 16, as having a significantly greater risk of becoming disengaged (Brynnner & Parsons, 2002; Mirza-Davies, 2013). Audit Commission (2010) used data collected by Connexions (a previous English Career Service) from over 24,000 YP and attempted to identify significant risk factors that were highly co-morbid with being NEET. Table 5 demonstrates that the most strongly associated factor with being persistently NEET for six months or more was being temporarily NEET at least once before (Audit Commission, 2010; Mirza-Davies, 2013).

Table 5

Risk factors for YP being NEET for six months or more (Audit Commission, 2010)

Risk Factor	Increase in chance of being NEET for six months or more
Being NEET at least once before	7.9 times more likely
Pregnancy or parenthood	2.8 times more likely
Supervision by youth offending team	2.6 times more likely
Fewer than three months post-16 education	2.3 times more likely
Disclosed substance abuse	2.1 times more likely
Responsibilities as a carer	2.0 times more likely

Despite the frequency of these common risk factors in the literature, there are always YP that demonstrate resiliency and do not follow this predicted trajectory (Toland & Carrigan, 2011). Resilience is often defined as the ability for people to lead positive and successful lives despite experiencing adversity and disadvantage (Schoon, 2006; Toland & Carrigan, 2011). Some of the most important factors found to promote a YP's resilience include having at least one person or family member who cares unconditionally, individual characteristics such as cognitive and self-regulation skills, self-esteem, and nurturing school environments (Toland & Carrigan, 2011).

Schoon (2006) applied the concept of resilience to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory to help appreciate the range of risk and resiliency factors YP from different circumstances will experience throughout their lifetime (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). When specifically considering YP who become NEET, Baldry et al., (2019) found that most had to demonstrate some resiliency and determination to overcome barriers and hurdles at some point in their lives. It is therefore important

when supporting a YP's engagement in EET, to remain aware of nurturing and building their individual resiliency, not just focus on addressing a YP's risk (Baldry et al., 2019; Cefai, 2008). Further consideration current support mechanisms and how they support a YP's risk and resilience are discussed in section 6.

In summary, there is a wealth of literature discussing the variety of risk and resiliency factors that could influence a YP's later NEET status, which can make it difficult to implement targeted and early intervention (Bell & Blanchflower, 2011; Brynner & Parsons, 2002). Further consideration of the breadth of understanding needed to understand why a YP might become NEET is considered in section 4.

3.7 Long-Term Outcomes

The consequences of being NEET during adolescence and young adulthood have been argued to be a powerful predictor of later outcomes (Brynner & Parsons, 2002; Hellier, 2009). A wealth of research suggests that the long-term trajectories of YP who are persistently NEET are often negative and can have lifelong implications on job opportunities, potential earnings, health and wellbeing and long-term unemployment (Bell & Blanchflower, 2011; Brynner & Parsons, 2002; Ralston et al., 2016). Research reported by Audit Commission (2010) highlighted that this group of YP often have poorer life chances than their peers, including:

- Four times more likely to be unemployed.
- Five times more likely to have a criminal record (the causal relationship of this is not known).
- Six times more likely to have poor qualifications and lower potential earnings.
- Three times more likely to have mental health problems, such as depression.

3.8 The potential impact of the Covid-19 pandemic measures and restrictions

It has been widely acknowledged that the impact of the financial crash in 2008 caused both job and opportunity losses for all, but this also drove a substantial increase in YP who are NEET (Bell & Blanchflower, 2011; Maguire, 2015). It is important to note that while conducting this research, another significant event was taking place in the form of the Covid-19 global pandemic. The impact of this on the economy and businesses across the nation is already being felt, and there are predictions that this will result in an increase in the numbers of NEET YP (Maguire, 2020). This could be as a result of funding reductions and financial cutbacks, which cause apprenticeship and job

opportunities to diminish for the vulnerable and disadvantaged (Maguire, 2020; Meechan, 2020; Senedd Cymru, 2020).

4.0 Psychological Underpinnings

Through consideration of the available literature, it appears there has been limited application of psychological thinking to support the understanding of YP who become NEET and why they might follow this trajectory. Researchers have highlighted the need for further application of psychological theory in order to develop appropriate intervention and support (Brynner & Parsons, 2002; Yates & Payne, 2006). Given the word limit challenges of this report, the following section will offer a brief overview of three potentially useful theories: life span developmental psychology, adolescent development and belongingness (Arnett et al., 2014; Pitkänen et al., 2021). This will then be followed with a more in-depth exploration of the application of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory due to its relevance and appreciation of the diversity of life experiences for YP (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1992).

4.1 Life Span Developmental Psychology

Lifespan developmental psychology is a framework that considers each individual human across their life stages, from conception to old age, helping to explore how unique and cultural differences are developed (Baltes, Lindenberger, & Staudinger, 2007). This theory has been applied to YP becoming NEET when considering the recent addition of a prolonged life stage that YP now experience when entering adulthood (Arnett et al., 2014; Brynner & Parsons, 2002; Gabriel, 2015). As was discussed in section 2.0, this transition to adulthood is now argued to be increasingly complex to manage (Canny et al., 2001; Robertson, 2019). It is suggested that this extended period of time in education has created a new life stage of 'emerging adulthood', where the need for YP to have more advanced qualifications, has created instability for those who may not have achieved them in school (Arnett et al., 2014).

4.2 Adolescent Development

Adolescence is often described as a developmental shift in YP's lives between late childhood and early adulthood (Spano, 2004). Adolescents are typically characterised as being between the ages of 10 and 18 years of age, and therefore YP who are at risk of becoming NEET will fall into this group

(World Health Organisation, 2014). This period is often described as a transitional process when YP experience significant change as they begin to explore the psychological characteristics of themselves to discover who they are and where they fit in the social world around them (Choudhury et al., 2006). Understanding and appreciating the complexity of emerging adulthood could be helpful for understanding why some YP may become NEET.

There is currently a wide range of psychology that can be applied to help understand adolescent development such as biological, social cognitive and ecological theories (Spano, 2004). The biological model helps to highlight the effect that physical changes in hormones and the brain can have on the behaviour of young adults during this period (Choudhury et al., 2006; Udry, 1988). A social cognitive theory argues that adolescent development is influenced by those around them, for example, parents, peers and teachers, through modelling and observing their behaviours (Choudhury et al., 2006). An ecological and cultural theory explains adolescence as an interaction between the individual and the wider environment around them (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This theory will be discussed in more detail in relation to YP at risk of becoming NEET in section 4.4.

4.3 Belongingness

Theories of belonging suggest it is basic psychological need and that people simply want to belong and fit in with groups of others, whether that is with family, friends or EET settings (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1943). Experiencing a strong sense of belonging and fitting into a group has been argued to increase well-being and life satisfaction which is vital for both psychological and physical health (Allen & Kern, 2017; Maslow, 1943). For YP, a sense of belonging can be fostered within a school community and Allen and Kern (2017) found that teachers have the biggest impact in promoting this. YP who regularly feel like they do not belong are often reported to feel isolated and dissatisfied with school (Allen & Kern, 2017; Allen et al., 2018; Muir et al., 2015). YP who are at risk of becoming NEET may regularly experience exclusions or absence from school which limits the positive time spent with teachers and peers (Arnold & Baker, 2013; Audit Commission, 2010; Muir, Jenkins, & Craig, 2015). Recent longitudinal research has explored the relationship between feelings of school belonging and later NEET status for YP aged 16-20 and found a significant positive correlation (Parker et al., 2021). If positive feelings of belonging in school do impact on later outcomes of being NEET, there are implications for professionals and schools to foster positive school experiences and connections (Parker et al., 2021).

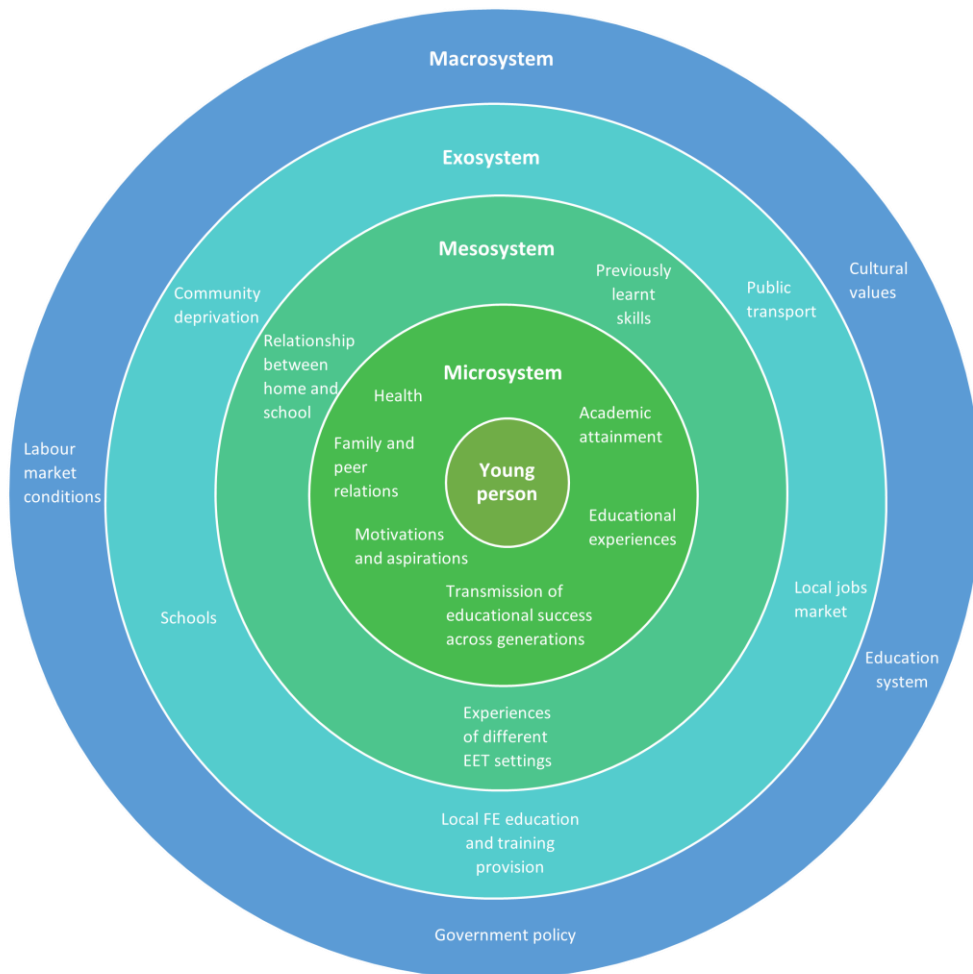
4.4 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

As well as individual contributing factors of YP becoming NEET, there are also a range of important systemic influences on a YP's life course, for example structural, cultural and societal factors (Chadderton & Colley, 2012; Gabriel, 2015; Sergi et al., 2018). One theoretical model that has been used by researchers as a lens to help understand these complexities is Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1992; Gabriel, 2015; Godden, 2015; Hodgson & Spours, 2015; Siraj et al., 2014). This model acknowledges that humans do not live in isolation, but that they are continually interacting with a complex web of systems and interconnecting factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1992). This interaction with the environment provides each person with an infinite number of unique life experiences, influencing both growth and development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1992). Bronfenbrenner (2001) calls these interactions 'proximal processes' and argues they are bi-directional, so the environment influences each individual person, and they also have a reciprocal impact back.

This model helps to highlight that YP who become NEET will have experienced a multitude of risk or resiliency interacting factors across their childhood and adolescence which will have impacted on them in some way (Hodgson & Spours, 2013; Lorine, Ryan, D'Angelo, & Kaye, 2019; Siraj et al., 2014). A visual representation of Bronfenbrenner's model and the application of common risk factors associated with becoming NEET helps to demonstrate the complex web of interrelating systems that are influencing the lives of every YP (Siraj et al., 2014) (see Figure 4). Siraj et al (2014)'s model has been adapted to include the Mesosystem and further discussion of each layer of the system and the relevance of its application to YP who are NEET is offered below.

Figure 4

An adaptation of Siraj et al (2014)'s application of NEET risk factors onto Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems model



4.3.1 Microsystem

The microsystem resides in the centre of the model and includes those that YP directly interact with in their immediate settings, for example, at home or at school (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This could include family, peer groups, teachers or the YP's own personal health (Siraj et al., 2014). Parents and other family members are widely recognised as having both positive and negative influences on YP's engagement with EET (Arnold & Baker, 2013; Manning, 2018; Robertson, 2019). Positive relationships, warmth and educational support have been argued to be protective factors against becoming NEET versus family breakdown, parental unemployment, or being a young carer as potential risk factors (Arnold & Baker, 2013; Cockerill & Arnold, 2018; Manning, 2018; Schoon, 2014).

Peer relationships have also been acknowledged as an influencing factor on engagement (Borrett & Rowley, 2020; Cockerill & Arnold, 2018; Craig, 2009).

4.3.2 Mesosystem

The mesosystem is described as the interrelations between different settings, for example home and school, where YP experience more diverse and complex relationships (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Here Bronfenbrenner (1979) hypothesises that positive experiences engaging in different places help YP to gain skills they can apply across a range of settings. For those entering young adulthood, this could include applying skills learnt in school to new post-16 destinations (Hodgson & Spours, 2013, 2015). Parry (2020) found that facilitating supportive networks and experiences were especially important for YP's confidence across post-16 transition.

4.3.3 Exosystem

The exosystem layer is described as any setting that does not involve the YP directly yet continues to have influence on their developing lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Regarding YP that are at risk of becoming NEET, this could include local geography, community values, job markets or obtainable post-16 providers (Hodgson & Spours, 2013, 2015; Siraj et al., 2014). Previous discussions in this review have highlighted the growing complexity of post-16 options however, research suggests that these may not always be available or accessible to YP (Bason, 2020; Gabriel, 2015; Lawson & Parker, 2020). Local job markets will also impact the opportunities that YP have access to, for example the economic crash in 2008 which affected youth unemployment, and ultimately resulted in more YP who became NEET (Schoon, 2014).

4.3.4 Macrosystem

The macrosystem acknowledges the influence that both national and international trends may have, including factors such as government policies which will impact directly on the provision YP may receive (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Hodgson & Spours, 2015). Significant cutbacks in public funding in Local Authorities (LAs) could limit many YP's access to support services if there are reductions in what is on offer (Lorine et al., 2019). The organisation of careers services and how this is delivered to YP would also be included in the macrosystem, for example in England the establishment of the universal Connexions service removed responsibility away from schools (Lorine et al., 2019). The effectiveness of this service was heavily criticised due to underfunding and staffing difficulties, and

thus may have affected many YP's access to the support they needed (Lorine et al., 2019; Reid, 2007).

4.3.5 The interaction of risk factors

Current research argues that an accumulation of risk factors will need to be considered when understanding a YP's risk of becoming NEET (Arnold & Baker, 2013; Arnold & Baker, 2012). Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory helps to provide a psychological lens to appreciate that becoming NEET is not just the result of one individual reason, but that there will be multitude of possible factors and influences (Lorine et al., 2019; Siraj et al., 2014). It helps to increase the appreciation of the complex relationship each YP has with their environment and that wider contextual factors, will continue to interact with a YP's engagement in EET and transition to adulthood (Hodgson & Spours, 2015; Lorine et al., 2019; Schoon, 2014).

4.3.6 Policies need to acknowledge the complexities of YP

By accepting this psychological framework, it acknowledges that government and LA policy need to appreciate how the whole system is working to support YP who are at risk of becoming NEET (Gorlich & Noemi, 2015; Sergi et al., 2018). This includes considering the types of support that are being offered to YP, and what impact a range of professionals and services may be having (Lorine et al., 2019). Without this overarching perspective, individual support could be provided with minimal appreciation of the wider systemic issues that may be at play (Hodgson & Spours, 2015; Siraj et al., 2014). This model also highlights that some YP will have more resources and support mechanisms to navigate the transition to adulthood easier than others, and therefore appropriately targeted responses are necessary to ensure that all YP are offered a chance to be successful (Robertson, 2019).

5.0 The Government Response

5.1 NEET's Cost to Society

Despite the definition of NEET being relatively new, the phenomenon of youth unemployment and the financial cost of those who remain in this category across their lifetimes has repeatedly been a feature in government policies (Arnold & Baker, 2013; Hughes, 2013; Welsh Government, 2013).

Over a YP’s lifetime, each NEET cohort is estimated to cost £13 billion in public finance (for example, welfare payments) and £22 billion in opportunity expenses (including loss to the economy) (Audit Commission, 2010) (see Table 6). Other studies have estimated that this figure is even higher and that lost output to the economy through youth unemployment could be as high as £28 billion alone, with added human and social costs on top (Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations, 2012). The costs that governments and taxpayers incur has been argued to be one of the main reasons that NEET YP attract significant attention from policy makers across Europe and the UK (Hughes, 2013).

Table 6

Estimated costs of each cohort of NEET YP (Audit Commission, 2010)

Age range	Opportunity costs	Public finance costs
Short term (16-18)	£2 billion	£2 billion
Medium term (19-59)	£20 billion	£11 billion
Long term (60 and over)	-	<£1 billion
Total	£22 billion	>£13 billion

5.2 UK Policies in response to the challenge

Over the past 20 years, the support that NEET YP have received in the UK has been guided by strategic government visions and policy (Hughes, 2013; Yates & Payne, 2007). Policies have been developed with two general aims; firstly, to prevent current YP within the education system becoming NEET and secondly to manage and reduce the current population of NEETs (Hutchinson et al., 2016). Policies are challenged to provide successful and sustainable interventions and support for these YP (Maguire, 2015). The devolution of Wales from the UK in 1997, as well as Northern Ireland and Scotland, has resulted in differing strategic and political agendas being implemented across each of the four nations of the UK (Hughes, 2013; Maguire, 2020; Williamson, 2007).

In 1999, the *Bridging the Gap* report was the first to use the term NEET, this policy suggested that YP lacked the appropriate support to enable them to achieve job and career opportunities, setting out a plan to provide them with better employability guidance (SEU, 1999). This included the introduction of the role of a personal advisor (PA) to help provide disadvantaged YP with individualised support,

as well as financial aid, known as the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) as an incentive for YP to stay in education (SEU, 1999).

In England, this led to the development of the Connexions service in 2001, who were given a specific remit to reduce NEETs (Sergi et al., 2018; Yates & Payne, 2007). This service was designed to develop the new role of a PA to specifically provide support around re-engagement in education and to tackle the individual barriers that YP face (Pemberton, 2008; Reid, 2007). See further discussion about the role of careers advisors in section 6.1.

5.3 The Welsh Context

The Welsh Government decided not to follow suit with the Connexions service, but instead developed the *Extending Entitlement: Supporting Young People in Wales* (National Assembly for Wales, 2000). This policy suggested that there was no need for the creation of new structures or professionals to support YP who are, or at risk of, becoming NEET, but argued that the current services within LAs needed to work better together to improve outcomes and increase engagement from those most disadvantaged and disengaged (National Assembly for Wales, 2000; Williamson, 2007). However, this was followed in 2003 by the introduction of the *Learning Pathways 14-19* which emphasised the need for flexible learning routes and 'Learning Coaches' (Welsh Assembly Government, 2002). This has been argued to be similar to the role of PA from Connexions (Williamson, 2007). The role of the learning coach was to provide an individually- tailored learning pathway, with the aim to help them achieve approved qualifications that were appropriate and bespoke to YP's interests and aptitudes (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008). Welsh policy aimed to ensure as many YP as possible stayed in education post-16 by providing more flexible learning options and continued support to re-engage the YP who became NEET (Welsh Assembly Government, 2003).

The Welsh Government furthered its commitment for reducing NEETs across the country through the Tackling Poverty Action Plan (2012-2016). Thus, what followed was the *Youth Engagement Progression Framework* (YEPF) (Welsh Government, 2013) which aimed to complement these policies with a non-statutory guidance, providing clear examples of how youth services could set up their targeted support for YP aged between 14-17 (Welsh Assembly Government, 2013). This was developed around the needs of YP and to strengthen the accountability of different systems in order to provide better outcomes. There are six building blocks that make up the foundations of this approach which are argued to be effective at increasing youth engagement and progression when

implemented together (see Table 7 below). The framework also includes the allocation of a lead worker within LAs who would have responsibility for ensuring all YP who are, or at risk of, becoming NEET receive the correct support. This role has been argued to be highly effective however due to current funding arrangements this position could be at risk long-term (Welsh Government, 2016b). Current responsibility for reducing NEET figures continue to lie with individual LAs who are required to negotiate and organise support across Careers Wales, youth services, schools, post-16 providers, voluntary sector and other partners (Welsh Government, 2016b).

Table 7

Six building blocks of the YEPF framework (Welsh Government, 2013)

Six building blocks of the YEPF
Early identification
Better brokerage and coordination of support
Stronger tracking and transition of YP
Ensuring provision meets the needs of YP
A focus on employability skills and opportunities for employment among YP
Greater accountability

Most recently, an *Employability plan for Wales* (2018b) was published, provided a new cross-cutting strategy targeted at reducing unemployment, inactivity and rates of NEET YP (Welsh Government, 2018). This led to the development of a new employability service called Working Wales which aims to see both the current inactivity rate and the gap between qualification levels become no more than the UK average over the next 10 years (Fawcett & Gunson, 2019; Welsh Government, 2018). This policy has three strands; youth engagement (for 16-17 year olds furthest away from work), youth training (16-17 year olds closer to engaging with work) and an adult section (18 years and older). It aims to continue to strengthen systematic approaches for supporting YP back into EET through robust mechanisms that better identify, support, and track YP at risk of dropping out (Welsh Government, 2018). This will continue to be done with a range of partners including schools, colleges, LAs, Careers Wales, youth workers and training providers (Welsh Government, 2018).

5.4 Critique of Government Policies

5.4.1 Outcome-led

Over the years, government policies have received criticism from researchers about whether they match up to addressing the individual needs of YP (Salisbury, 2004). Policies have been critiqued for being performance and target led, rather than providing meaningful and authentic support to those who need it (Salisbury, 2004). Williamson (2007) argues that policy responses have been strong within the UK to support YP who are NEET however they have failed to make a difference on an individual level.

5.4.2 Within-Child focus

Policies have also been critiqued for focusing on a within-child deficit model as the only cause for YP becoming NEET (Gabriel, 2015; Pemberton, 2008). The *Bridging the Gap* report implemented strategy responses, arguing the underlying cause of being NEET was due to lack of employability skills (Reid, 2007; Salisbury, 2004). Criticisms include “failing to acknowledge that the functioning of deep-rooted structural factors in society such as class, race and gender profoundly affect life chances” (Colley & Hodkinson, 2001, p. 345) and “locating the causes of non-participation (solely) within individuals and their personal deficits” (Pemberton, 2008, p. 335). It is suggested that structural, cultural and societal factors as contributing to YP becoming NEET have been largely ignored in government policy responses (Pemberton, 2008).

5.4.3 Funding

Continued austerity measures and budget cuts across all LAs have meant that a centralised funding pot to support YP who are, or at risk of, becoming NEET has been depleted (Maguire, 2020). This has reduced flexibility and has required more creative thinking for LAs to finance support for YP, and in Wales specifically a significant proportion of funding comes from European Union finance pots, for example, the European Social Fund (ESF) (Audit Commission, 2010; Maguire, 2020; Welsh Government, 2013).

5.4.4 Devolved nations not working together

The differing responses across the four nations of the UK has been argued to have led to fractured decision-making and a lack of clarity over the policies being implemented which it is suggested has allowed YP to fall through the gap (Hughes, 2013; Maguire, 2020; Williamson, 2007). However, there are striking geographical differences within the UK, and Wales encompasses stark differences between both urban and rural areas (Welsh Government, 2018). This could suggest that more localised specific responses to supporting NEET YP is important (Maguire, 2020; Nelson & O'Donnell, 2012).

6.0 Current Provision/Interventions

Current provision and intervention primarily aim to prevent YP within the education system becoming NEET as well as to manage and reduce the current population of NEETs (Hutchinson et al., 2016; Nelson & O'Donnell, 2012). The literature surrounding practice is wide due to the vast array of professionals and services that can be involved, including teachers, teaching assistants, learning mentors, social workers, EPs, careers services, youth workers and charities (Arnold & Baker, 2013). The following section will include a brief overview about some of the current support available to YP who are, or are at risk of, becoming NEET, why the strategies are important and what the current evidence base suggests. Table 8 outlines some of the preventative strategies that aim to target YP before they become disengaged with EET. Table 9 includes research about the success of current responsive strategies to re-engage YP.

6.1 Preventative Support

Table 8

Summary of preventative support strategies

Support Mechanism	Why is this important?	What has the research found?
Early Identification	Early identification toolkits have been developed to help identify YP that are risk of disengaging from EET (Arnold & Baker, 2013; Arnold & Baker, 2012; Nelson & O'Donnell, 2012; Welsh Government, 2013). This provides time for interventions and support to be put into place within schools to offer a proactive response to supporting these YP (Arnold & Baker, 2013).	Arnold and Baker (2012) developed one such early identification screener and concluded that over 50% of YP entering the NEET category could be identified by age 14.
School-based support	YP who have negative school experiences and leave with minimal qualifications have an increased risk of becoming NEET (Arnold & Baker, 2013; Billington, 2018). This points to the important role that schools have in raising engagement and attendance of YP at school and preparing them for the adulthood life beyond (Audit Commission, 2010; Robertson, 2019).	Currently there is little evidence-based practice of how schools should support YP who are at risk of becoming NEET (Prevatt & Kelly, 2003; Robertson, 2019). Although, there is extensive literature exploring ways to improve YP's engagement in school which could be applied to supporting those at risk. Some of this could include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embedding career education and improving motivation

		<p>within parts of the school curriculum (Malloy et al., 2010; Prevatt & Kelly, 2003).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focusing on fostering feelings of belonging in schools, which have been found to be linked to later NEET status and calls for the key role of teachers to achieve this (Parker et al., 2021).
<p>Alternative Learning Pathways</p>	<p>It is important to provide an inclusive education however YP at risk of dropping out of school are likely to be experiencing exclusions from school and/or social isolation from peers (Malloy et al., 2010; Nelson & O'Donnell, 2012). Alternative programmes and curriculums can be provided to YP who find mainstream education difficult, focusing on providing a mixture of educational and vocational activities whilst maintaining a focus on building self-esteem and motivation (Haughey, 2009; Malloy et al., 2010; Pronk et al., 2020).</p>	<p>Some research evaluating the use of alternative pathways and curriculums have been found to significantly increase attendance and engagement whilst reducing the risk of YP becoming NEET post-16 (Haughey, 2009; Malloy et al., 2010; Pronk et al., 2020). By providing more flexible and personalised provision, these programmes have been argued to increase motivation to remain engaged in EET more successfully than traditional educational methods (Fan & Wolters, 2014; Haughey, 2009; Kettlewell et al., ; Nelson & O'Donnell, 2012).</p>
<p>Supportive Relationships</p>	<p>YP can sometimes lack a stable adult who could help to provide continuous and personal support (Arnold & Baker, 2013). It is suggested that building supportive and positive relationships increases feelings of belonging in EET, acting as a protective factor against YP dropping out (Arnold & Baker, 2013; Edgar et al., 1995; Fan & Wolters,</p>	<p>Research has identified that providing one-to-one support and developing strong relationships with YP does positively impact on engagement (Cockerill & Arnold, 2018; Kettlewell et al., 2012; Pronk et al., 2020). One study found that YP who had supportive family, peer or professional relationships were less likely to drop out than those who did not (Pronk et al., 2020). Research has highlighted the</p>

	2014).	importance of the preventative nature of these relationships as YP who become NEET and socially isolated can be harder to form relationships with (Li, Liu, & Wong, 2018).
Careers Advisors	The role of Career Advisors and their part in preventing NEETs have been widely discussed, especially since the development of the Connexions service in England (Godden, 2015; Reid, 2007; Spielhofer et al., 2009; Yates & Payne, 2006). Careers services aim to offer impartial advice and guidance to YP, provide support with employability skills and raise awareness of post-16 options (Pemberton, 2008).	As well as practical career advice, advisors have been previously identified as a supportive and stable adult within YP's lives to support re-engagement (Arnold & Baker, 2013). However, evidence for the effectiveness of careers advice on increasing YP's engagement is limited (McCrone & Filmer-Sankey, 2012).
Post-16 Transition Support	Research has noted that post-16 transition is a critical time for professionals to implement preventative intervention and support (Cockerill & Arnold, 2018; Craig, 2009). YP should be provided with information, advice and guidance pre-16, and made more aware of the range of options available to them, to ensure that they make appropriate choices (Cockerill & Arnold, 2018; Spielhofer et al., 2009).	The role of supportive relationships and increased familiarisation of their post-16 destination were found to increase YP's feelings of preparedness for post-16 transition (Craig, 2009; Manning, 2018; Parry, 2020).
Financial Support	Various government policies have provided some YP with	Evidence suggests that YP generally respond well to financial

	financial support and incentives to remain engaged in EET (Audit Commission, 2010). In Wales since 2004, EMA has been in place to provide disadvantaged YP with £30 per week if they are attending an EET provision (Bryer, 2014).	support and paid opportunities, which have been found to improve engagement as well as supporting positive long-term outcomes (Bloom, 2010; Bryer, 2014; Nelson & O'Donnell, 2012).
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6.2 Responsive Support

Table 9

Summary of responsive support strategies

Support Strategy	Why is this important?	What has the research found?
Supportive Relationships	As was established as a preventive strategy, supportive relationships have also been identified as a key strategy to re-engage NEET YP (Arnold & Baker, 2013; Nelson & O'Donnell, 2012)	Developing high quality and sustained one-to-one support has been described to be pivotal in re-engaging YP who are NEET (Miller et al., 2015; Nelson & O'Donnell, 2012). Having a key relationship with a youth worker was found to be a key underpinning to the success of a re-engagement intervention (Miller et al., 2015). These relationships were built on trust and building empowerment and YP reported the success of achieving this (Miller et al., 2015)
Re-engagement	Re-engagement programmes and strategies aim to re-	A meta-analysis of re-engagement strategies found they did have a

<p>Programmes</p>	<p>integrate YP back into EET, often using a combination of classroom and work-based approaches (Mawn et al., 2017; Nelson & O'Donnell, 2012). Programmes tend to be split into two types; those that offer learning opportunities to develop careers skills and those that offer more sustained nurture before re-engagement with EET can take place (Nelson & O'Donnell, 2012).</p>	<p>small increase in employment, however these effects were not seen in YP who were the furthest away (Mawn et al., 2017). An evaluation of a 12-week intervention with YP who are NEET, found increased confidence and empowerment to achieve new life goals (Robertson, 2018). Some research has helped to highlight the potential of using online methods as a way of engaging YP who would find face-to-face interventions difficult, especially in supporting building peer relationships (Kivijarvi, Aaltonen, & Vesa, 2019; Li et al., 2018).</p> <p>However, it has been identified that there is a need for high-quality research about what does actually work to re-engage YP, as there is currently a limited evidence base nor longitudinal data of long-term outcomes (Bloom, 2010; Mawn et al., 2017; Nelson & O'Donnell, 2012).</p>
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6.3 Summary of Support

Research examining the effectiveness of support explicitly aimed at reducing negative outcomes for YP who are at risk of becoming NEET is limited, although there are positive indicators of what could be useful (Mawn et al., 2017; Robertson, 2019). It is important to note that the above summary of current preventative and responsive strategies are implemented by a multitude of different professionals (Arnold & Baker, 2013), raising a thought about how YP access and receive this support. When considering Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, the interaction between schools and other services are likely to have a significant impact on YP's experiences and impact of the implemented support (Arnold & Baker, 2013; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Yu, 2020). For example, it is argued that "among such professionals there might be different expectations and conflicting ideas about promoting the young person's best interests" (Arnold & Baker, 2013, p. 12). It is suggested that a co-ordinated and appropriate multi-agency response is needed (Arnold & Baker, 2013), however there is currently limited evidence about how this could look.

7.0 Systematic Literature Review

7.1 Introduction

The Children and Families Act (2014) and the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Code of Practice: 0-25 years (Department for Education, 2015) saw an extension of the EP role in England to support YP from birth to the age of 25 (Morris & Atkinson, 2018). Recent legislative changes to the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Code of Practice in Wales will also reflect this extension of the age range and is predicted to come into place in 2021 (Welsh Government, 2018a). This legislation will require the EP profession to forge links with post-16 educational provisions, adult services and training and apprenticeship providers (Atkinson et al., 2015; Morris & Atkinson, 2018). Prior to these legislative changes, support from EPs for YP going into post-16 provisions had been largely neglected (Gabriel, 2015; Hellier, 2009).

In 1985, discussion first emerged on the importance of EPs supporting YP who might be at risk of social exclusion and becoming NEET; "As educational psychologists do we not have a role in helping schools identify and meet the needs of pupils, who might be perceived as facing the severe problems that being unemployed will pose for them" (Thompson & Leyden, 1985, p. 1). However, to date there has been very little research in England and Wales that explores the potentially unique

contribution that EPs could make and what does exist is very much in an emergent stage (Gabriel, 2015; Morris & Atkinson, 2018). This comes with the exception of research from Scotland EP services, who have been implementing psychological support to post-16 provisions for over 10 years (Currie & Goodall, 2009; Hellier, 2009; MacKay, 2009; 2020).

7.2 Rationale and literature search question

There have been calls by other professionals that a better psychological understanding for supporting YP who are, or at risk of, becoming NEET is needed (Brynner & Parsons, 2002; Mawn et al., 2017; Yates & Payne, 2006). Mawn et al (2017) argued that the NEET agenda is currently being tackled by professionals focused on social policy and economics and that those best placed to understand behaviour, including psychologists, are not often involved. However, further consideration and understanding of the unique contribution EPs could make to support this group of YP is needed (Selfe, Pelter, & Relton, 2018).

Therefore, a systematic synthesis was conducted which aimed to critically evaluate what current EP focused research has identified as important when working with YP who are at risk of becoming NEET. It also sought to identify key implications for EP practice within the NEET agenda. This review will provide a comprehensive picture of the current topic area and will answer the following question:

What has EP focused research identified as important for YP who are at risk of becoming NEET and what are the implications for EPs?

7.3 Method

The thematic synthesis review was modelled on Bond, Woods, Humphrey, Symes, and Green's (2013) framework, due to the inclusion of both quantitative and qualitative studies. This helped to ensure that the review captured the diversity of the current research base.

7.4 Search strategy and study selection

Systematic searches were performed between August and September 2020 using the following electronic databases: PsycInfo, Applied Social Science Index (ASSIA), Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC), British Education Index (BEI), Scopus and Web of Science (WoS). The key

search terms included “NEET”, “not in education”, “youth unemployment”, “transition”, “post-16” OR “16-25” AND “educational psychology” OR “school psychology” (see Appendix A for a full list of search terms).

Other appropriate literature was identified using a snowball technique through search engines such as Google Scholar and scanning reference lists (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Additional manual searches were carried out in relevant Educational Psychology journals, for example, *Educational Psychology in Practice*. Book chapters and unpublished doctoral theses were included if they met the inclusion criteria.

7.5 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The gathered literature was analysed for relevance to this study and were individually considered by the researcher. Recent research was included (post 2000) due to the political and societal context in which NEETs sits, however no empirical research papers prior to 2009 were found. A pilot systematic search was carried out to explore research papers that had a primary focus on YP who are or at risk of becoming NEET, however this produced only six results. Therefore, the decision was made to also include general post-16 research papers in this review, if they met the inclusion criteria, due to the transferable information that could still be relevant to answering the research question (see Table 10).

Table 10

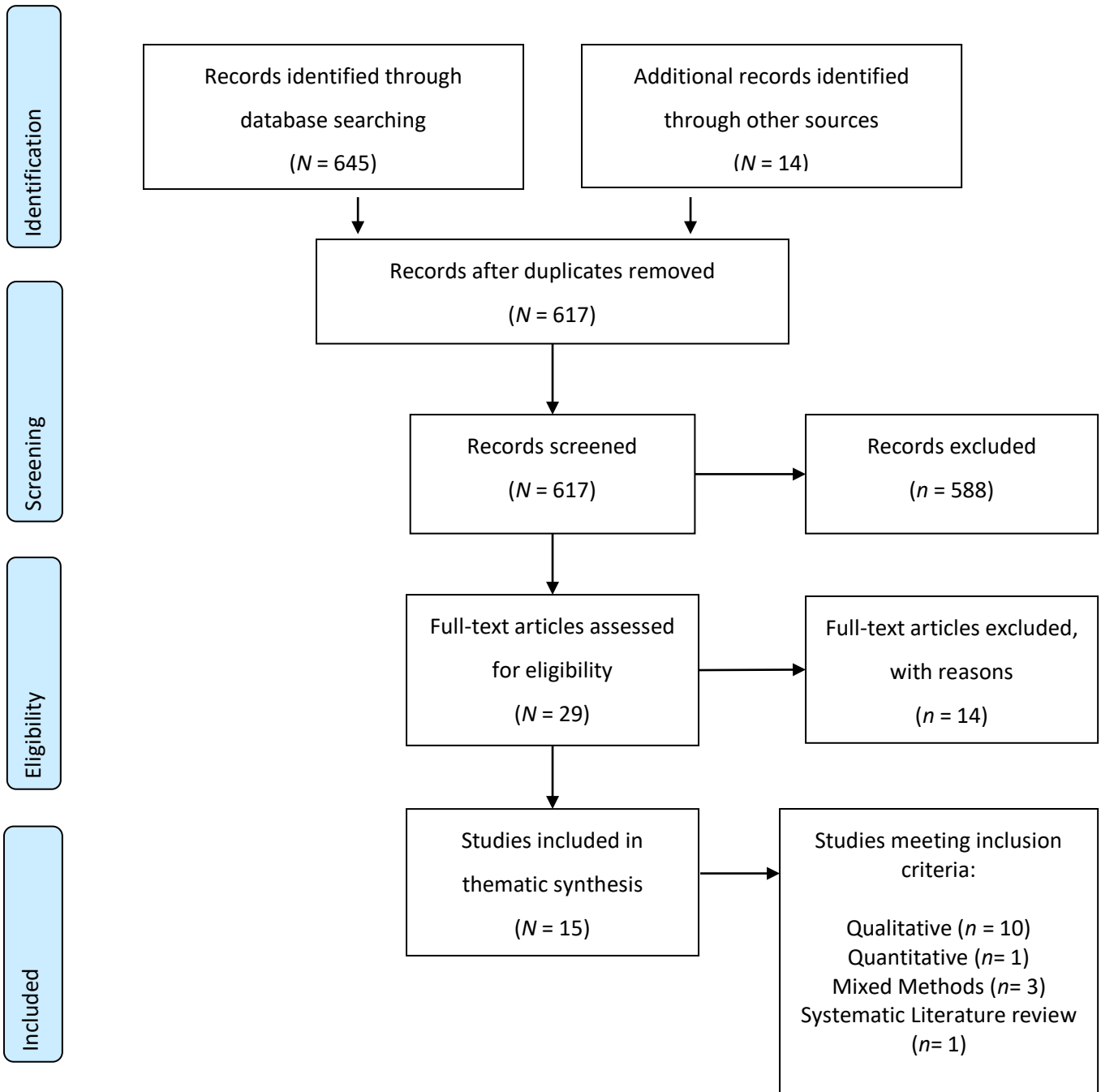
Inclusion criteria for systematic literature review

Inclusion Criteria
1) an empirical investigation paper containing either qualitative or quantitative data or a systematic review
2) published during or after the year 2009
3) published in a peer reviewed journal, unpublished doctoral thesis or textbook
4) based in the UK
5) was carried out or directly supervised by EPs
6) the research focus was on YP who are or at risk of becoming NEET, supporting and re-engaging YP aged 16-25 in EET or a focus on post-16 transition
7) does not primarily focus on a specific ALN

The process of this review adhered to the guidelines in the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta Analyses (PRISMA) (Moher et al., 2009; 2015). After duplicates were removed, 617 studies were examined against the inclusion criteria. 29 studies were remaining which underwent an additional sifting process, where the title, abstract and full article were reviewed to ensure the most relevant research was included. 15 studies were excluded with reasons given (see Appendix B). Following this criterion and guidelines, 15 papers were included within the review (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

PRISMA process for the systematic literature review



7.6 Quality Appraisal

Studies that met the inclusion criteria were examined for quality, collecting both descriptive and evaluative information. Due to the combination of methodologies being examined, the trustworthiness, relevance and results of each study were critically assessed using The Critical Appraisals Skills Programme (CASP) checklist (CASP, 2018), where applicable. See Table 11 for the characteristics and critical appraisal of each included study.

7.7 Data Extraction

Data extraction and synthesis procedures were based on those outlined by Cresswell, Hinch and Cage (2019). Conducting the coding of the findings was a multi-phase process, involving extracting information about the methodology and participants as well as the findings. This was carried out through multiple readings of each study and coding all the relevant information. This was reviewed by both the researcher and research supervisor to ensure inter-coder reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The codes were developed and categorised into themes of the findings which are displayed in a thematic map (see Figure 6 and 7).

7.8 Outcomes

In total, 15 studies were included in this review (see Table 11) which took place between 2009 and 2020. Ten out of the 15 studies used qualitative methods, one used quantitative methods, three used mixed methods and one was a systematic literature review. 12 papers were published in peer reviewed journals, two were book chapters and one paper was an unpublished doctoral thesis. The papers largely involved YP as the participants (aged between 15-25 years), however EPs, career advisors, school and college teachers, parents and other professionals were also included.

Table 11

Characteristics of primary included studies

Reference	Country	Research Focus	Participant Characteristics	Design	Analytical Approach	Themes - Findings	Critique
Atkinson, Dunsmuir, Lang and Wright (2015)	England	To develop a competency framework for TEPs and EPs to understand what knowledge and skills will be needed when working with the 16-25 age range.	24 EPs	Online questionnaires and face-to-face meeting	Delphi polling and Content analysis	<p>Important considerations for EPs working with YP aged 16-25:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase knowledge and awareness of post-16 educational provisions. • Forge relationships and work collaboratively with post-16 specialist services. 	<p>The Delphi polling technique could be criticised for reporting the opinion of EPs rather than reporting findings about what works. If repeated, the results found could change as the EP role continues to develop.</p> <p>This framework focuses on general post-16 support but the considerations for EPs remain valid for those YP at risk or who already are NEET.</p>

Reference	Country	Research Focus	Participant Characteristics	Design	Analytical Approach	Themes - Findings	Critique
						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to person centred planning and elicit YP's voices. • Support YP's continued access to appropriate provision and support. • Support LAs to develop practice and policy for post-16 transitions. 	
Arnold and Baker (2012)	England	To develop a local screening tool to identify YP who might be at risk of entering the NEET category.	A group of Personal Advisors (PA) and EPs and 79 YP.	Group collaboration, database information collecting, in-person and telephone	t-test and framework for analysis.	A screener was effective at identifying around 50% of YP in Year 9 at risk of becoming NEET aged 16. This allowed YP to receive early	Ethical considerations are acknowledged for screening YP. This screener was only piloted in one locality and the authors acknowledge that local

Reference	Country	Research Focus	Participant Characteristics	Design	Analytical Approach	Themes - Findings	Critique
		A pilot was then carried out to test the screener in a secondary school.	181 pupils and 16 of these received intervention.	interviews and personal contact or telephone support with a careers advisor.		intervention and support from PAs. Recording the accumulation of risk factors was necessary for picking up some vulnerable YP who would not meet threshold for individual services. Providing work experience opportunities and ensuring a positive post-16 transition are protective factors against becoming NEET.	differences will alter the risks for becoming NEET. However, it does provide a positive technique that could help identify YP in need of early intervention.
Bason (2020)	England	To investigate whether a person-	6 pupils (in Year 12 or 13) and their	Multiple case-study design. Questionnaires	Thematic Analysis	PCRs can provide opportunities for multi-agencies to	This study took place in one special school which reduces

Reference	Country	Research Focus	Participant Characteristics	Design	Analytical Approach	Themes - Findings	Critique
		centred meeting (PCR) can help to make specific post-school transition plans alongside how this can be achieved for YP with SEN.	parents – observed by 6 non-participant observers	and interviews.		liaise about post-school transition. They can provide good YP participation and opportunities to listen to their voice. PCRs supported destination decision making however supporting a YP's skills for adulthood was often missed. EPs are well placed to conduct inclusive PCRs and support YP's choices post-school.	generalisation of PCRs across different LAs. This research was not about YP who were disengaged with education, however the findings could help to inform effective methods of supporting positive post-16 transitions for those at risk or who already are NEET.
Billington (2018)	England	To explore the individual views of YP on the topic of missing	3 YP (15-17yrs)	An active listening approach was applied across three meetings	The Voice-Centred Relational Method	Adults who enabled a sense of belonging and connection were identified as positive by the YP. Adults	This study contained only three participants which reduces generalisability; however, this

Reference	Country	Research Focus	Participant Characteristics	Design	Analytical Approach	Themes - Findings	Critique
		education		with each YP		who did not appear to understand a YP's perspective were viewed negatively. A Person-Centred Active Listening Model was developed to use as a guide for EPs to support YP missing education.	methodology explored their views in-depth. The development of a useable model for EP practice helps to raise awareness and understanding of the systemic factors that could be interacting with a YP's non-attendance.
Borrett and Rowley (2020)	England	To explore the views of YP from disadvantaged areas who have returned to education. This research sought to explore what	20 YP (19-25 years)	Participatory approach Focus Groups	Thematic analysis	Support, connectedness and belonging had positive effects on attendance, enjoyment of learning and belief in their ability. These feelings diminished in secondary school	Although it is not explicitly reported that YP had experienced being NEET, all had fewer than 5 GCSEs and had a gap in education of at least one year. Their reflections and views could provide

Reference	Country	Research Focus	Participant Characteristics	Design	Analytical Approach	Themes - Findings	Critique
		supported them to achieve this.				compared with primary schools and colleges. Both work experiences and a key adult in school were found to increase self-belief and motivation. For some YP, the break from education was important for them to reflect on adversity's they had faced.	important considerations for YP at risk of or who already are NEET when attempting to re-engage in EET.
Craig (2009)	Scotland	To explore current practice within schools, FE colleges and other professionals when planning	23 professionals from either schools, post-16 provisions or other agencies, such as Careers	Questionnaires – professionals Interviews – YP	Thematic Analysis	Key positive relationships with adults and peers and familiarisation with intended destinations supported YP's post-16 transitions. Better multi-agency working	This study had a small sample size in one LA. It did not include the views of YP who did not transition to a post-16 destination successfully. However, the views of YP who

Reference	Country	Research Focus	Participant Characteristics	Design	Analytical Approach	Themes - Findings	Critique
		YP's post-16 transitions	Scotland or social workers and 5 YP currently attending college			and sharing of information would ensure that appropriate support is in place for YP with additional needs. EPs have a role supporting individual YP and also work systemically to support schools with best practice. EPs also have a role to work strategically and conduct research into effective ways for YP to transition successfully.	have made a successful transition can still offer insight into support for YP at risk of becoming NEET.
Crichton and Hellier (2009)	Scotland	To evaluate a multi-agency team of EPs,	34 YP (15-18 years).	Standardised questionnaires, semi-	One-tailed Wilcoxin matched pairs signed ranks	Results suggest that after a 3-week life skills programme, ¾	All YP did not participate in all parts of the data gathering

Reference	Country	Research Focus	Participant Characteristics	Design	Analytical Approach	Themes - Findings	Critique
		Careers Scotland and other training providers in attempting to re-engage YP who were NEET.	All YP had multiple barriers to engagement and training.	structured interviews, focus groups and pre- and post- attendance and progression data	test Individual rating scales	of YP successfully reintegrated into a training position. ¾ of these continued to be engaged at a 3- month follow-up. Providing YP with a greater locus of control, positive relationships and new skills helped to re- engage these YP and improved feelings of confidence and value in themselves. This has implications for EPs to collaborate with agencies who deliver re- engagement programmes to	process which creates more limitations to generalise the findings. An in-depth form of analysis was not used for the qualitative data which may have left out some important themes. However, the process of triangulation across the data suggests good outcomes of re- engagement and feelings of self-worth for these YP.

Reference	Country	Research Focus	Participant Characteristics	Design	Analytical Approach	Themes - Findings	Critique
						evidence positive strategies and interventions that work.	
Currie and Goodall (2009)	Scotland	To explore how YP at risk of becoming NEET could be identified and what support had been successful across their transition post-16	34 YP who had previously left 4 secondary schools across 4 LAs	Questionnaires	Exploration of common themes	School staff did not identify any clear patterns to predict whether YP would become NEET. YP identified that positive relationships, careers services and work experiences were important support mechanisms. Implications for EPs were drawn to improve collaborative working with careers services and schools and build better links	This study included a mix of YP who were either NEET or in a post-16 destination however all were linked to Careers services and therefore might not have been the most difficult to reach YP. No formal analysis was conducted which could have missed out important themes.

Reference	Country	Research Focus	Participant Characteristics	Design	Analytical Approach	Themes - Findings	Critique
						with other post-16 providers.	
Gabriel (2015)	England	To explore YPs perceptions of a time when they were NEET now that they are re-engaged in an EET setting and to explore implications for the role of EPs.	9 YP (17-21 years) 4 adult stakeholders with roles within the realms of NEET	Interviews	Thematic Analysis for the YP's interviews. A lighter touch approach to the stakeholder interviews.	Being NEET was found to be a negative experience for all YP. Findings suggest that better support from significant others and tailored options and choice for post-16 destinations would benefit YP. Implications for EPs to support schools systemically with YP at risk of becoming NEET, forge better links with careers and other post-16 agencies and support ways to hear YP's	With all YP now re-engaged, this study may not contain the most disadvantaged YP. This study was a doctoral thesis and therefore was not peer reviewed however it will have been rigorously examined during the viva process. A focus on positive factors to re-engage YP offers insight into strategies.

Reference	Country	Research Focus	Participant Characteristics	Design	Analytical Approach	Themes - Findings	Critique
						voices.	
Haughey (2009)	Scotland	To evaluate the success of an alternative vocational education programme, for YP who had become disaffected by secondary school.	91 YP in first condition 139 YP in second condition	Attendance figures and post-school destinations were analysed	Two-sample t tests, chi-square tests and post hoc multivariate analysis.	Results found that this alternative programme, with both vocational and educational elements, significantly improved attendance and reduced the likelihood of YP becoming NEET post-16. Implications were made for EPs to work with LAs to develop policy around alternative provisions for YP who are disengaged with traditional schooling.	This study was retrospective using available data and therefore some was missing from the analysis. This included details of the implementation and delivery of the programme limiting conclusions about which specific aspects had an impact. However, the results are positive about the impact alternative programmes could have.
Lawson and Parker (2020)	England	To explore the lived	4 YP from a specialist Sixth	Semi-structured	Interpretative phenomenological	Results suggest that positive relationships	This study used a small sample of YP from one

Reference	Country	Research Focus	Participant Characteristics	Design	Analytical Approach	Themes - Findings	Critique
		experiences of YP with SEN transition into a post-16 setting	Form college	interviews	analysis (IPA)	and having autonomy in decision making are important factors that support YP transition to FE. Implications are made for EPs to support at the group or systemic level to ensure that YP's voices are heard and that they are offered choice for their future destination.	sixth-form college however interviews were analysed in-depth. These YP were not disengaged from education and were therefore not necessarily at risk of becoming NEET, however the identified support strategies are helpful to inform practice.
Mallinson (2009)	Scotland	To explore the views of vulnerable YP and college teachers about what support helped or	17 YP (aged 15-18) 5 college teachers	3 focus groups and 11 follow-up semi-structured interviews	An abbreviated version of grounded theory	Themes of improved communication between schools and FE, better and more consistent induction programmes for all YP and fostering positive	The YP that took part were a self-selected sample from one college. These YP were asked about what support helped prevent drop out

Reference	Country	Research Focus	Participant Characteristics	Design	Analytical Approach	Themes - Findings	Critique
		hindered post-16 transition and prevented YP dropping out.				and respectful relationships were found to support YP in FE and reduce drop-out. Implications were offered for EPs to provide strategic support in improving collaboration with schools and colleges and by providing training.	however they themselves had not dropped out and may not represent the views of YP at risk of becoming NEET. However, some important factors to consider during post-16 transitions were found.
Manning (2018)	England	This research aimed to explore the experience of post-16 transition to FE college for YP with an	3 YP (Year 11)	Semi-structured interviews – carried out both before and after transition	Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)	Findings suggest that YP should be involved with all decision making about their futures and improvements in ensuring their voices are heard would	This research explored the views of YP who were not disengaged from education and had transitioned successfully. Although the themes are helpful in understanding what

Reference	Country	Research Focus	Participant Characteristics	Design	Analytical Approach	Themes - Findings	Critique
		Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP)				increase feelings of autonomy and independence. The application of self-determination theory was used to explore how this might be beneficial. Fostering positive relationships and visiting post-16 provisions were also helpful to support transitions. Implications were made for EPs to work both individually and systemically with schools to ensure that YP's views are heard.	supports post-16 transitions, the views of YP who did not successfully transition were not included.
Morris and Atkinson	England	To explore the potential role	7 studies were included	Systematic Literature	Systematic Literature Review	Findings suggest that EPs could contribute	This systematic review found that there was

Reference	Country	Research Focus	Participant Characteristics	Design	Analytical Approach	Themes - Findings	Critique
(2018)		and contribution that EPs could make in supporting YP transition into further EET		Review		to post-16 transitions at the systemic, group and individual level. The review identified a lack of post-16 options for YP and implications for collaborative working and early identification of YP at risk of becoming NEET. Findings also suggest further research is needed to develop evidence-based practice for supporting post-16 transitions.	limited published research in this area and the majority of current literature had been carried out by doctoral students. However, these papers still stand up to rigorous viva procedures. This review did not entirely focus on YP at risk of becoming NEET however implications were drawn upon for this group.
Parry (2020)	England	To critically explore YP's views about	13 YP (16-19 years)	Semi-structured interviews	A critical discursive psychological	Findings reflect the reliance and importance of	This research included an in-depth analysis of the views of engaged

Reference	Country	Research Focus	Participant Characteristics	Design	Analytical Approach	Themes - Findings	Critique
		who helped or hindered transitions from school to work			(CDP) approach	supportive networks to aid YP's transition to work, including parents, friends, or teachers. Careers advisors were not viewed as supportive due to a lack of understanding about their role and how they could help. Findings also suggest that schools tend to focus on education as a preferred destination over employment or training. Implications for EPs include using appropriate tools to elicit YP's views, forge	YP however those who are disengaged may have had different perspectives on what helped. YP in this research were reflecting upon a transition to work that was upcoming leading to the question of whether their views would be the same post transition.

Reference	Country	Research Focus	Participant Characteristics	Design	Analytical Approach	Themes - Findings	Critique
						better links with employment destinations and to initiate collaborative working with careers services and occupational psychologists.	

7.9 Themes

Overall, the research identified many supportive factors that are important for YP who are at risk of becoming NEET during their time in pre and post 16 settings and across transition. Most of the included studies comprised of YP participants which provided a detailed insight of an often-underrepresented group (Arnold & Baker, 2013; Gabriel, 2015). The addition of EP, professional and parental participants helped to add systemic input from a range of perspectives. Although the studies identified many positive strategies and support mechanisms that are currently in place, it also uncovered difficulties and restrictions about YP's access to this support. Implications for the role of the EP and LAs are discussed in section 7.11 and 7.12.

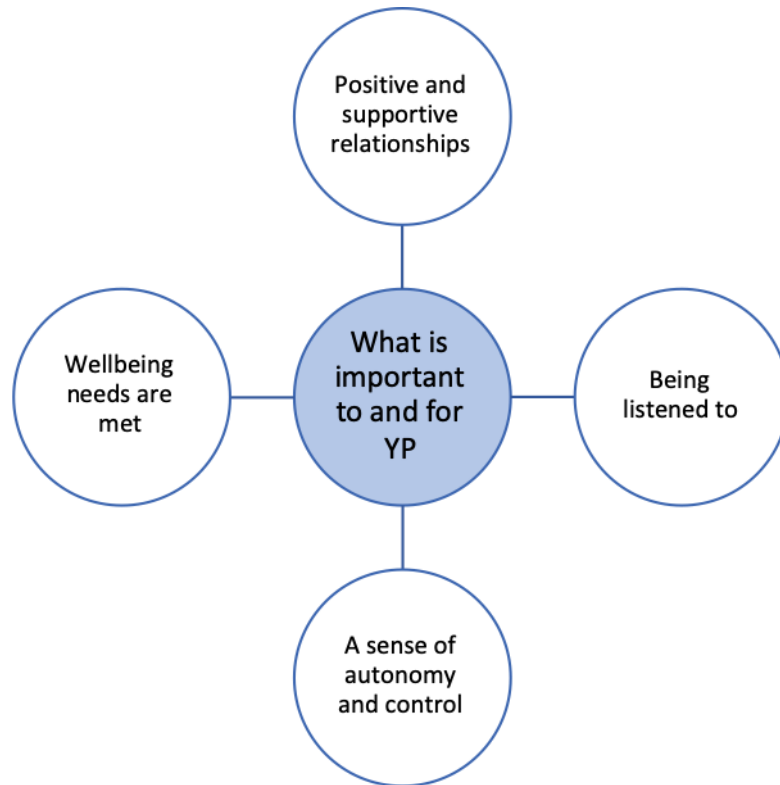
The outcomes are visually represented in two themes. The first encompasses what was found to be important to and for YP during engagement with EET (see Figure 6). The second theme highlights what others can do to support YP in EET (see Figure 7).

7.9.1 Theme 1: What is important to and for YP

This theme represents the voice of the YP that came through the selected research about what is most important to them for engagement in EET. This included having positive and supportive relationships with those around them as well as having their voices genuinely heard. YP responded best to provisions that enabled autonomy and control over their own lives and decisions. The research also highlighted the importance of addressing a YP's wellbeing needs if they are to effectively engage with EET.

Figure 6

Thematic Map of Theme 1 “What is important to and for YP”



7.9.1.1 Positive and supportive relationships

YP identified that positive and supportive relationships with adults and peers were significantly important and were highly depended upon whilst in school, across transition and in post-16 destinations (Borrett & Rowley, 2020; Craig, 2009; Gabriel, 2015; Lawson & Parker, 2020; Manning, 2018; Parry, 2020). This included YP placing value on having adequate support from their families (Craig, 2009; Parry, 2020). Family members were found to be useful for decision making and providing practical support (Manning, 2018), as well as supporting re-engagement (Borrett & Rowley, 2020). Peer support and friendships were also noted to help prevent dropout rates from EET (Crichton & Hellier, 2009; Mallinson, 2009; Manning, 2018).

YP identified that relationships with school staff increased self-belief, aided decision making and they helped to advocate their wishes in school and across post-16 transition (Billington, 2018; Borrett & Rowley, 2020; Craig, 2009; Currie & Goodall, 2009; Lawson & Parker, 2020). Craig (2009, p. 49) explained that “Pupils themselves placed great value on the assistance that school staff provide during this period of their lives, identifying it as one of the main things that helped them during their

transition". These connections were also a key support mechanism when working towards re-engagement in EET (Crichton & Hellier, 2009). College staff relationships were also identified as important, however YP did report that they were different to those in school (Lawson & Parker, 2020; Mallinson, 2009). However, college did offer opportunities to make new relationships and connections (Manning, 2018).

YP who did not have these supportive relationships during their education, acknowledged that they would have greatly benefited from them (Craig, 2009; Gabriel, 2015). Some YP identified that they later went on to build these connections whilst in employment instead, which improved self-belief in themselves that they never had whilst in school (Borrett & Rowley, 2020; Gabriel, 2015).

7.9.1.2 Being listened to

The studies highlighted that if adults provide opportunities to listen and respect a YP's thoughts and feelings, this can have a positive impact on motivation and enjoyment in EET (Crichton & Hellier, 2009; Mallinson, 2009; Manning, 2018). For example, it was identified that "Teachers who were fair and listened with respect were appreciated" (Mallinson, 2009, p. 36).

Pupils who took part in a re-engagement programme reflected positively on the opportunities they were given to be listened to, and researchers argued that this supported more meaningful participation (Crichton & Hellier, 2009). This was similarly identified as a protective factor against dropping out of school or college (Billington, 2018; Mallinson, 2009). Practically, listening to YP's views also helped to ensure that issues were picked up early and support could be tailored appropriately (Craig, 2009; Manning, 2018). A variety of methods to do this meaningfully in settings were suggested, including using person-centred approaches (Bason, 2020; Billington, 2018; Morris & Atkinson, 2018; Parry, 2020).

7.9.1.3 A sense of autonomy and control

The research base strongly suggested that if YP feel a sense of ownership and control over their lives and options for post-16, this will increase meaningful engagement in EET (Crichton & Hellier, 2009; Lawson & Parker, 2020; Manning, 2018). In college, YP reported that staff provided them with greater independence and empowerment to make choices than they had in school, which supported YP to feel more valued and respected (Lawson & Parker, 2020). This was similar to outcomes of a re-engagement project for YP who were NEET, where YP responded more positively to intervention

when they were able to make their own decisions: “The programme served as an opportunity to empower them to take more positive control of their own development and promote aspirations, by improving self-esteem, motivation and levels of confidence – all of this, perhaps, improving their perceived lotus of control” (Crichton & Hellier, 2009, p. 81).

7.9.1.4 Wellbeing needs are met

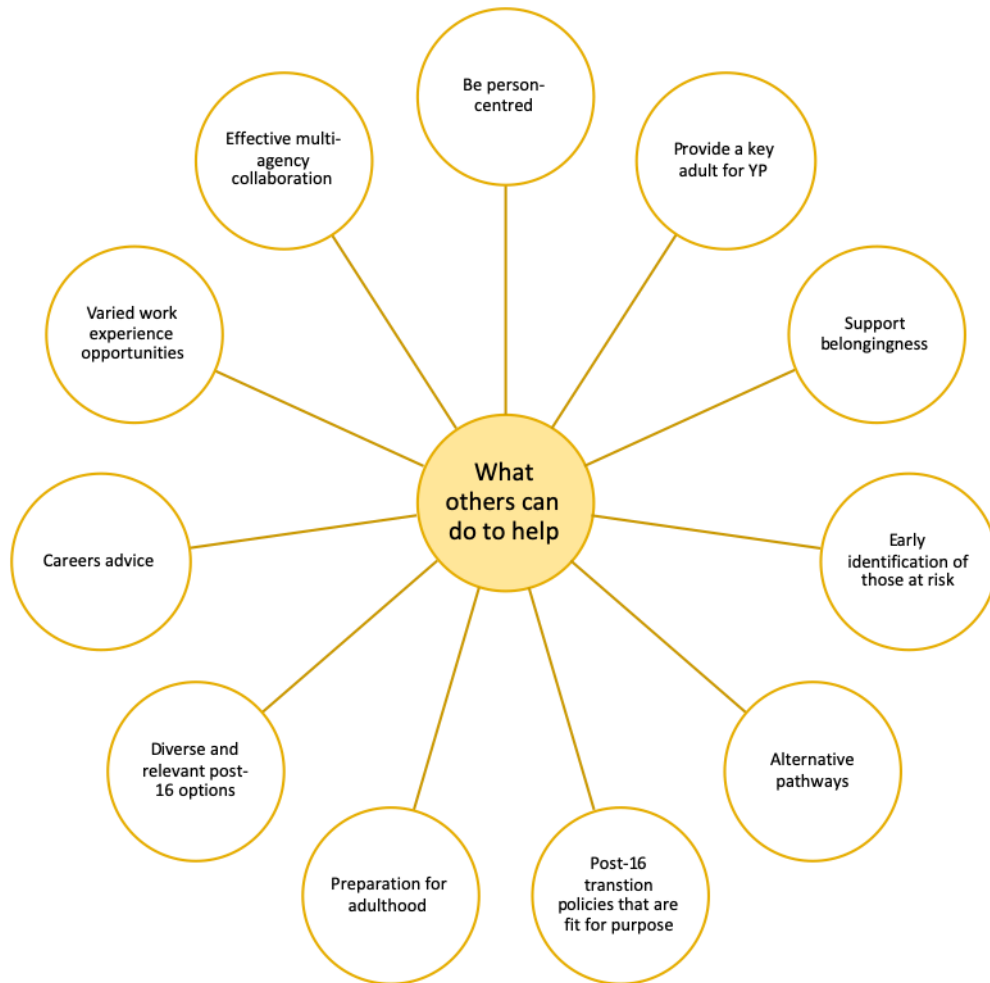
Some YP were identified across post-16 transition to require support to manage feelings of anxiety (Craig, 2009; Morris & Atkinson, 2018). For YP who had become NEET, it was often self-reported that they had low perceptions of themselves, little positive vision of the future and were lacking in confidence to do anything (Crichton & Hellier, 2009; Gabriel, 2015). For example, “Insecurity, lack of confidence and feeling low and trapped by their circumstances were common experiences...” (Gabriel, 2015, p. 177). Research found that if the right EET experience was provided, YP reported significantly improved wellbeing and feelings of belief and value in themselves (Crichton & Hellier, 2009; Gabriel, 2015).

7.9.2 Theme 2: What others can do to help

This theme represents what a range of professionals can do to support engagement and prevent YP becoming NEET. This includes strategies to embed directly within EET settings as well as wider systemic considerations, for example, using pupil-centred practice and developing adequate post-16 transition policies.

Figure 7

Thematic Map of Theme 2 “What others can do to help”



7.9.2.1 Be person-centred

Using person-centred techniques were found to increase YP’s involvement in planning their post-16 transition and helped to ensure their voice was centralised and heard (Bason, 2020; Billington, 2018; Manning, 2018). They were also found to enhance the involvement of external agencies when planning for post-16 transition, alongside the YP and their family (Bason, 2020; Manning, 2018). Using person-centred approaches “...brought about more awareness of how the school could enhance pupil participation and it provided opportunity to consider pupil strengths and preferences” (Bason, 2020, p. 74).

Putting YP at the centre of a re-engagement programme was concluded to be a core part of its success (Crichton & Hellier, 2009). Researchers argued that person-centred planning techniques were an important component of working with YP aged 16-25 to elicit their views and allow them choice and control (Atkinson et al., 2015; Billington, 2018; Gabriel, 2015; Lawson & Parker, 2020; Morris & Atkinson, 2018).

7.9.2.2 Provide a key adult for YP

Research identified that providing a designated key adult who could help and support YP during their post-16 transition was important (Craig, 2009; Currie & Goodall, 2009). For those who did not receive this type of support, YP reported that having someone with whom they could discuss future plans with, as well as worries and concerns, would have been helpful (Craig, 2009; Currie & Goodall, 2009). Key adults in school were found to make an impact on a YP's self-esteem, engagement and "to develop a belief in their own abilities" if they showed genuine interest and care in their lives (Borrett & Rowley, 2020, p. 20; Gabriel, 2015). Billington (2018) also identified the importance of having a key adult for YP who are at risk of becoming NEET and developed an active listening model which aimed to guide the development of this supportive relationship.

7.9.2.3 Support belongingness

Educational provisions, family members and friends were found to support YP's sense of belonging, which increased feelings of safety, acceptance and value, and in turn had a positive impact on attendance and enjoyment in learning (Borrett & Rowley, 2020; Lawson & Parker, 2020). This belonging and connectedness could be found through positive relationships with staff and with peers (Billington, 2018; Borrett & Rowley, 2020; Manning, 2018). YP were found to positively describe the school community as a second family: "Common to YP's talk was emphasis on how they sensed a belonging to the school community. Chloe made sense of this by relating it to (a) family..." (Lawson & Parker, 2020, p. 51). Research also identified that by fostering a sense of belonging and safety in school, this can act as a protective factor when transitioning to a new post-16 setting and helped YP to feel more prepared (Lawson & Parker, 2020; Manning, 2018).

7.9.2.4 Early identification of those at risk

The ability to identify YP who are at risk of becoming NEET was argued to be crucial so that early intervention and support can be implemented before leaving school and transitioning post-16

(Arnold & Baker, 2012; Currie & Goodall, 2009; Mallinson, 2009; Morris & Atkinson, 2018). Researchers argued that being able to implement “...early intervention with individuals who are identified as vulnerable can reduce the incidence of NEET” (Arnold & Baker, 2012, p. 79). Early identification screeners have been found to identify around 50% of YP who are at risk of becoming NEET up to 3 years prior to leaving school (Arnold & Baker, 2012). By capturing and recording an accumulation of risk and vulnerability, this helped to identify YP who may not have otherwise met thresholds for support from individual services (Arnold & Baker, 2012). It was recognised that different geographical areas may have different risk factors which screeners would need to consider (Arnold & Baker, 2012). Although it was also acknowledged that early identification tools would not always be able to catch all YP who might become NEET (Arnold & Baker, 2012; Currie & Goodall, 2009).

7.9.2.5 Alternative pathways

Research highlighted that there is an importance for YP who are disaffected from the traditional forms of education to have access to alternative programmes (Haughey, 2009; Morris & Atkinson, 2018). In an alternative programme lasting six months, which had both vocational and educational elements, YP’s attendance significantly increased and their predicted post-16 destination improved (Haughey, 2009). The YP that participated previously had very low levels of attendance and high levels of disengagement in school and the outcomes of the programme reduced their risk of becoming NEET to the same as YP from a mainstream school (Haughey, 2009). It was felt that “... there was some success in retrieving a number of these young people and re-engaging them in a purposeful adult-led programme.” (Haughey, 2009, p. 56). This improvement however was only seen in male pupils and was explained by a reduced variety of vocational choices to cover all YP’s interests (Haughey, 2009). Although alternative programmes might be the best way to increase engagement for some YP, it was also recognised as important to maintain high standards and expectations (Morris & Atkinson, 2018). Alternative options for post-16 destinations were also highlighted as important to allow YP to return to education when it is right for them (Borrett & Rowley, 2020; Crichton & Hellier, 2009).

7.9.2.6 Post-16 transition policies that are fit for purpose

Post-16 transitions need to provide stability and continuity, whilst ensuring YP arrive safely at their intended destination (Arnold & Baker, 2012; Atkinson et al., 2015). YP reported feeling more prepared for post-16 transition when opportunities for pre-visits, learning about their intended

courses and adequate inductions were carried out (Craig, 2009; Manning, 2018). For example, “Students who whilst at school had the opportunity to become familiar with college... said they felt more prepared for their move from school.” (Craig, 2009, p. 46). However, this was found not to be consistent for all YP, with some reporting minimal support before transitioning (Craig, 2009; Mallinson, 2009).

Calls were made for better links and relationships between schools and post-16 providers to bridge transition and ensure a smoother experience for YP (Currie & Goodall, 2009; Morris & Atkinson, 2018). Information sharing between schools and post-16 providers was not always found to be accurate or consistent, and implications for some YP meant they were on the wrong course for their needs (Craig, 2009; Mallinson, 2009). Research suggested that YP were not always aware of other options that were available nor how to access them (Gabriel, 2015; Manning, 2018).

YP were also found to gain new perspectives and understanding after post-16 transition and recommendations were made for them to have a role supporting future transitions for those younger than them (Currie & Goodall, 2009; Manning, 2018).

7.9.2.7 Preparation for adulthood

Relationships with teachers in college supported YP’s preparation for adulthood by encouraging independence, building interpersonal skills and encouraging YP to be responsible (Craig, 2009; Lawson & Parker, 2020). One programme helped YP to learn new skills, such as teamwork and co-operating with others, which were also rated as important for transitioning into another EET (Crichton & Hellier, 2009).

However, preparation for life after school was sometimes rated as poor, with YP reporting that they could have been better prepared (Bason, 2020; Currie & Goodall, 2009; Mallinson, 2009). Participants felt that “...destination can take priority over what was going on for the pupil within school or identifying the skills that a young person should be supported to develop once they leave secondary school” (Bason, 2020, p. 77). YP who were provided with some skill sessions during Personal Social Education (PSE) lessons often could not remember them taking place (Currie & Goodall, 2009).

7.9.2.8 Diverse and relevant post-16 destinations

A common theme from researchers echoed a lack of diverse and relevant post-16 destinations, restricting choices that all YP can make (Bason, 2020; Lawson & Parker, 2020; Morris & Atkinson, 2018). This included particular restrictions of choice for YP with an ALN (Bason, 2020; Morris & Atkinson, 2018). College was consistently assumed to be the expected destination for YP with limited exploration of other options (Bason, 2020; Currie & Goodall, 2009; Lawson & Parker, 2020; Morris & Atkinson, 2018). YP were found to be "... indicating an understanding of college as an extension of school, or possibly the default destination." (Lawson & Parker, 2020, p. 55). Lawson and Parker (2020) found that only one YP went to look around another option for post-16.

In another study when other options were explored, YP felt that employment or training were not seen as favourably by teachers compared to further education options (Parry, 2020). Some YP reflected that employment was the most appropriate destination for them, however links and options to do this were fragmented and unclear (Borrett & Rowley, 2020; Currie & Goodall, 2009; Gabriel, 2015). It is also important to note that previous subject choices in school could limit and restrict the choices YP could make for post-16 (Mallinson, 2009).

7.9.2.9 Careers advice

Establishing early links with a careers advisor was found to reduce YP's risk of entering the NEET category (Arnold & Baker, 2012). Careers services were argued to be a unique and important service to discuss and consider post-16 destinations and YP should receive this support (Bason, 2020; Gabriel, 2015; Mallinson, 2009). For example, participants felt that "The role of the Connexions career advisor was pivotal in discussing further education..." (Bason, 2020, p.75). However, YP did acknowledge that they were not always sure how to access this or whether it would be helpful for them (Currie & Goodall, 2009; Parry, 2020). The issue of careers advisors being an external service was raised as this can cause difficulties in providing consistency of support to all YP (Morris & Atkinson, 2018).

7.9.2.10 Varied work experience opportunities

Providing varied work experience opportunities was identified as a potential protective factor against future disengagement as it allowed YP to develop skills that could instil self-belief and increase interest in EET (Arnold & Baker, 2012; Borrett & Rowley, 2020; Currie & Goodall, 2009). It was argued

that “The benefits of having some experience of work are measurable and long-term...” (Arnold & Baker, 2012, p. 79). However, it was found that YP in college were unable to access work experience opportunities due to staff’s difficulties acquiring adequate risk assessments (Mallinson, 2009). Currie and Goodall (2009) found that 91% of 34 NEET YP had not accessed any form of work experience. YP who were previously disengaged from school reflected retrospectively that entering a work environment significantly improved engagement and belief they could achieve something (Gabriel, 2015).

7.9.2.11 Effective multi-agency collaboration

A current challenge to effectively collaborate with multi-agencies to support YP was uncertainty about individual roles and responsibilities (Bason, 2020; Currie & Goodall, 2009; Morris & Atkinson, 2018). The transfer of information between schools and post-16 providers seemed to differ widely and poor systems meant that YP did not always receive timely and appropriate support, with issues around consent being one of the causal factors (Craig, 2009; Mallinson, 2009). YP valued person-centred reviews to help devise action plans whilst having all agencies around the table to plan for post-16 transition (Bason, 2020; Manning, 2018). This was found to be of benefit to many participants as “both he and his parents found discussing his next steps within his annual review meetings helpful, especially because ‘everyone’ was together.” (Manning, 2018, p. 126).

A competency framework that was devised by EPs highlighted that effective multi-agency working and relationship developing would be essential for work in the post-16 arena, to ensure smooth transition between child and adult services (Atkinson et al., 2015). However, there was a general consensus that more needs to be done to ensure collaborative and multi-agency working between schools, post-16 providers, careers services, voluntary agencies and EPs to ensure that YP always receive the correct support and ultimately don’t become NEET (Currie & Goodall, 2009; Gabriel, 2015; Mallinson, 2009).

7.10 Discussion

This systematic review aimed to thematically synthesise current EP focused research and what it has identified as important for YP who are or risk of becoming NEET. These studies offer valuable insight into current support for YP both pre- and post-16 and highlighted a number of implications for EPs which are applicable across the range of current approaches with individuals, groups, EET settings and wider systems as outlined in Figure 8 (Welsh Government, 2016a).

The findings also identified an important implication for local authorities and national policy makers which is discussed below in section 7.12.

7.11 Implications for EPs

Figure 8

Implications for EPs (see below)

Individual



- EPs have a key role to explore YP's views using person-centred techniques (Bason, 2020; Billington, 2018; Mallinson, 2009). This includes ensuring that YP have been actively involved in planning for post-16 (Bason, 2020; Manning, 2018).
- EPs are well-placed to facilitate individual work with YP, families and school staff to support engagement in EET and post-16 transition (Craig, 2009; Parry, 2020).
- YP regularly report feelings of anxiety and worry around the post-16 transition (Craig, 2009; Morris & Atkinson, 2018). The skills of EPs could help to support YP with these feelings and provide therapeutic support when needed.

Group



- Peer and family support has been highlighted within the literature as a protective factor against disengagement from EET (Critchton & Hellier, 2009; Mallinson, 2009; Manning, 2018). EPs could contribute by facilitating peer and family support groups to help develop meaningful friendships and connections. This concept could also be applied to support YP who are NEET to re-engage, creating support networks which could help to increase motivation and confidence to return to EET (Critchton & Hellier, 2009).

Educational Settings



- EPs are currently strategically placed to provide training and support to schools, alternative provisions and post-16 providers. This could include increasing awareness of the importance of providing key adult support, ensuring YP feel a sense of belonging and community, and embedding pupil-centred practice to improve motivation to engage and reduce the risk of YP becoming NEET (Craig, 2009; Gabriel, 2015; Manning, 2018).
- EPs could also help to develop post-16 transition policies that include work experience opportunities, adequate career advice, adult encouragement and support for YP to make informed decisions about their intended destination and provide adequate pre-visits and inductions (Arnold & Baker, 2012; Billington, 2018; Craig, 2009; Currie & Goodall, 2009).
- Liaising closely with EET settings, EPs could contribute to identifying YP who are at risk of becoming NEET to ensure that early intervention is provided (Arnold & Baker, 2012).

Wider systems



- EPs could contribute to improving links between schools, post-16 providers/services, charities and careers advisors to establish continuity and stability of support for YP (Atkinson et al., 2015; Bason, 2020; Mallinson, 2009).
- EPs are ideally placed to contribute to LA wide transition policies, to ensure that all YP receive opportunities for work experiences (Currie & Goodall, 2009). This includes ensuring continuity of adult support across the transition and into the post-16 destination for those most at risk of dropping out (Borrett & Rowley, 2020; Parry, 2020)
- Support alternative pathways and curriculums to maintain high standards and expectations of providing good support and outcomes for YP (Haughey, 2009; Morris & Atkinson, 2018)
- Develop procedures and policies to support the re-engagement of YP who have become NEET, especially providing adult support to build confidence and self-belief (Critchton & Hellier, 2009; Gabriel, 2015).

7.12 Implication for Local Authorities and policy makers

One further implication for LAs and policy makers that is important to note is the consideration of what post-16 destinations are available. These findings suggest that there is not enough diversity of options and choices for YP, and especially for those with an ALN (Bason, 2020; Lawson & Parker, 2020; Morris & Atkinson, 2018). Therefore, it is important for LAs and policy makers to consider the breadth of post-16 destinations that are available and whether these appropriately meet the diverse range of needs of all YP to remain meaningfully engaged in EET.

8.0 Academic and Professional Rationale for Further Research

Since the definition of being NEET was first noted in the *Bridging the Gap* report in 1999, there has been both a political and social interest in reducing the numbers of YP that fall into this category (SEU, 1999; Yates & Payne, 2006). This is partly due to the evidence of long-term, negative consequences for those who remain long-term unemployed (Bell & Blanchflower, 2011; Brynner & Parsons, 2002; Ralston et al., 2016). There are currently a large array of professionals that are involved both preventatively and responsively supporting YP who are identified as at risk of becoming NEET to transition into adulthood (Arnold & Baker, 2013; Nelson & O'Donnell, 2012). The application of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory helps to acknowledge the complexities of supporting these YP, acknowledging the wider contextual factors that are at play (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Siraj et al., 2014; Symonds, Schoon, & Salmela-Aro, 2016). This demonstrates the importance of providing a co-ordinated and effective support system (Arnold & Baker, 2013), however there is currently limited research about how these professionals and services work in practice to support YP who are at risk of becoming NEET.

Upcoming changes to legislation regarding the role of EPs will reflect an extension of the age range to support YP up to age 25 in Wales (Department for Education, 2015; Welsh Government, 2018a). This legislation will require the EP profession to forge links with post-16 educational provisions, adult services and training and apprenticeship providers, including supporting YP who are at risk of becoming NEET (Atkinson et al., 2015; Morris & Atkinson, 2018). The outcomes of the systematic literature review identify that there are unique contributions that EPs could make across various levels, from the individual, groups, EET provision and wider systems. However, there are currently no studies carried out in the context of Wales, therefore limiting the application of the role of the EP into the current systems.

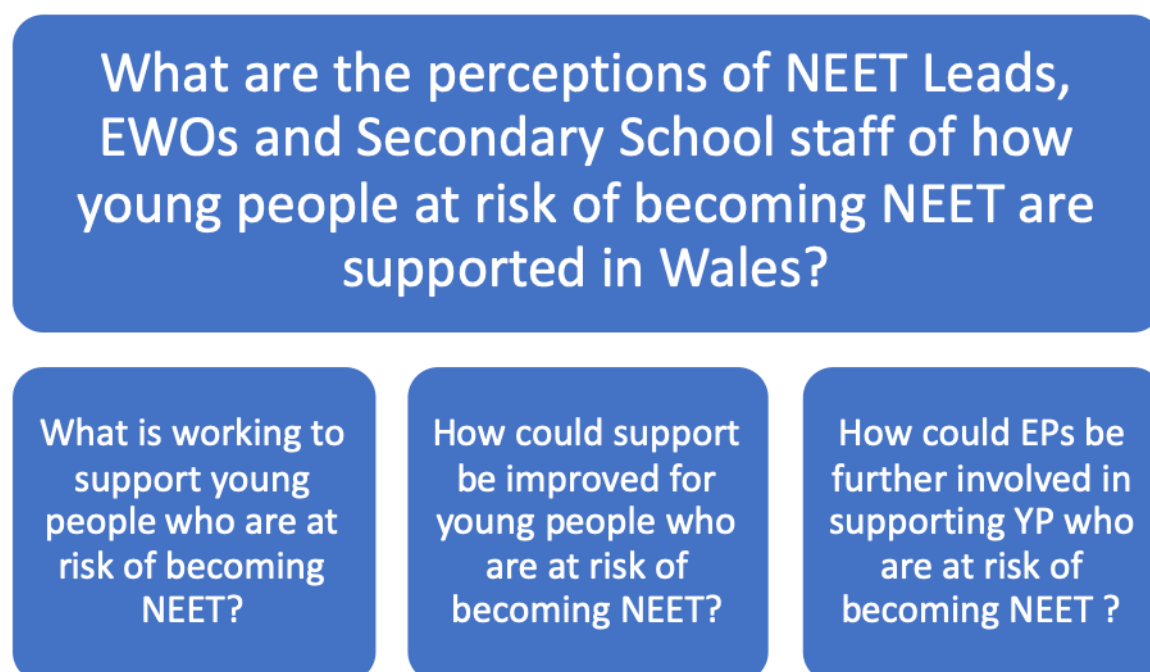
Consequently, this study will seek to explore current practice surrounding support for YP who are at risk of becoming NEET in Wales. As there is currently limited evidence of what this looks like, this research will seek to explore what different professionals are doing to support YP. This will aim to include what is currently working, any difficulties or barriers, and elicit implications for EPs. This led to the development of the research questions, as seen in Figure 9.

9.0 Research Questions

This research was therefore guided by the following research questions, consisting of one overarching question and three subsidiary questions.

Figure 9

One overarching and three subsidiary research questions of the current study.



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An Exploration of Multi-Professional Practice Working with Young People who
are At Risk of Becoming Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) in
Wales: Implications for the EP profession.

Part B: Major Empirical Study

Word Count: 9,600

1.0 Abstract

The lifelong implications for young people (YP) aged 16-24 who become Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) have been widely documented, attracting considerable attention from Welsh Government and Local Authorities (LAs). Recent legislative changes to the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Code of Practice in Wales will see an extension to the role of Educational Psychologists (EPs) to support YP up to the age of 25 years, requiring the profession to forge links with post-16 providers and services (Welsh Government, 2018). This will include a remit to consider those who are at risk of dropping out of education, employment or training (EET). However, to date there has been little research about where the role of the EP may fit to support this group of vulnerable YP.

This study explored current practice of professionals in four LAs in Wales who are already established in supporting YP who are at risk of becoming NEET. 10 semi-structured interviews were carried out with NEET Leads, Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) and secondary school staff and the data was analysed using Thematic Analysis (TA). Encouraging outcomes were found about the current support available and its contribution to increasing the engagement and retention of YP in post-16 EET. Nevertheless, participants also identified some key difficulties and barriers to the successful implementation of these strategies. The data highlighted areas for the potential role of the EP at the individual, group, and wider systemic level. Implications for LAs and Government policy makers are also identified.

2.0 Introduction

The need for YP to enter further EET after leaving school has been identified as an important safeguard against negative life outcomes and social exclusion (Brynnner & Parsons, 2002; Social Exclusion Unit, 1999). For those who do not successfully make this transition, YP will become classified as NEET, and research suggests they are more likely to face life-long disadvantage (Arnold & Baker, 2013; Hutchinson, Beck, & Hooley, 2016; Maguire, 2015).

2.1 The NEET Definition

In the UK, this group of YP were first identified in South Wales in the mid-1990s (Rees, Williamson, & Istance, 1996). The definition of being “NEET” was then made a formally recognised term in the *Bridging the Gap* report published by the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) (1999) and is now widely used across many EU countries (Furlong, 2006; Maguire, 2015; Sergi, Cefalo, & Kazepov, 2018). This research adopts the Office of National Statistics (ONS) definition that states that a YP aged between 16-24 years “who is not in any of the forms of education or training listed and not in employment is considered to be not in education, employment or training (NEET)” (ONS, 2020).

The term “NEET” has previously been criticised for ignoring the diversity and complexity of individuals, as well as overlooking whether a YP is only temporarily out of EET (Furlong, 2006; Hutchinson et al., 2016). Research has attempted to address this, and three distinct categories of NEET YP have been identified with varying distinguishing characteristics including: ‘open to learning NEET’, ‘sustained NEET’ and ‘undecided and NEET’ (Spielhofer et al., 2009). It has also been found that approximately 25% of YP will experience being NEET at some stage, however for most this will not last longer than six months (Audit Commission, 2010). However, for YP who are in the ‘sustained NEET’ category for prolonged periods of time, the trajectories are often negative with lifelong scarring effects in job opportunities, potential earnings and health and wellbeing (Bell & Blanchflower, 2011; Brynner & Parsons, 2002; Ralston et al., 2016; Spielhofer et al., 2009).

2.2 Prevalence in Wales

Current figures suggest that at the end of 2019, 11.1% of 16-18 year olds (11,200 YP) and 15.7% of 19-24 year olds (38,500 YP) were NEET in Wales (Welsh Government, 2020). It is important to note that the numbers of NEET YP in Wales have been higher than the UK average since 2007, raising questions about why this might be the case (Welsh Government, 2020).

2.3 Risk Factors

There are many risk factors that have been recognised as potentially contributing to a YP becoming persistently NEET, including a breadth of social, family and school experiences (Arnold & Baker, 2013; Gabriel, 2015; Mirza-Davies, 2013). Socioeconomic status, regularly missing periods of school, having an Additional Learning Need (ALN) and being care experienced have also been found to be highly

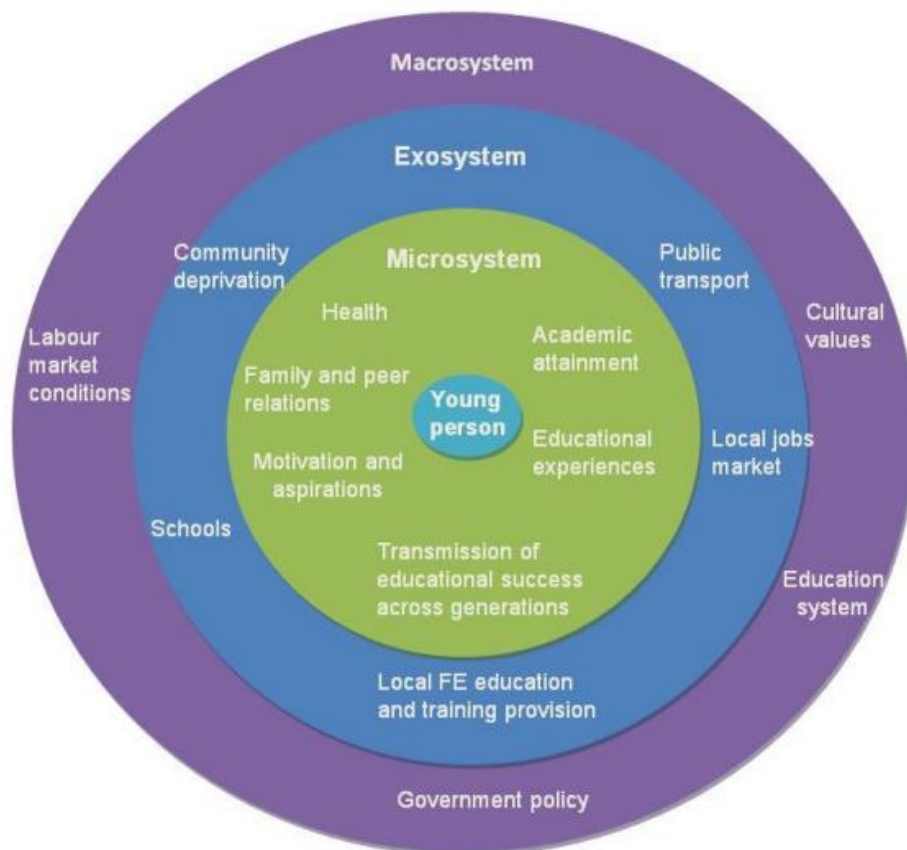
linked to NEET status later in life (Arnold & Baker, 2017; Brynner & Parsons, 2002; Pitkänen et al., 2021).

2.4 Psychological Underpinnings

One theoretical model that has been used by researchers as a lens to help understand the complexities of YP becoming NEET is Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1992; Gabriel, 2015; Godden, 2015; Hodgson & Spours, 2015; Siraj et al., 2014). This model acknowledges that humans are continually interacting in a complex world of interconnecting systems. A visual representation of Bronfenbrenner’s model and the application of risk factors that are associated with becoming NEET can be seen in Figure 10 (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1992; Siraj et al., 2014).

Figure 10

Application of NEET risk factors onto Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems model (Siraj et al., 2014)



The microsystem resides in the centre of the model and includes the people that YP directly interact with on regular basis, for example, family and teachers at home or school (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Siraj et al., 2014). The exosystem layer includes aspects such as local geography, community values, job markets or available post-16 providers (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Hodgson & Spours, 2013, 2015; Siraj et al., 2014). The macrosystem acknowledges the important influence that both national and international trends may have, including factors such as government policies and the importance of getting these right (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Hodgson & Spours, 2015). This psychological framework highlights the complexity of factors interacting on YP and emphasises the need for consideration of all the systemic elements when planning and developing support strategically, in order to work effectively with YP who are at risk of becoming NEET (Gorlich & Noemi, 2015; Sergi et al., 2018).

2.5 Government Policy

Over a YP's lifetime, each NEET cohort is estimated to cost £13 billion in public finance (for example, welfare payments) and £22 billion in opportunity expenses (including the loss to the economy) (Audit Commission, 2010). As a result, NEET YP have attracted significant attention from policy makers across Europe and the UK (Hughes, 2013; Yates & Payne, 2007). Government policies have often been developed with two general aims: firstly, to prevent current YP within the education system becoming NEET and secondly to manage and reduce the current population of NEETs (Hutchinson et al., 2016). However, they have often faced criticism for focusing on performance and targets and ignoring systemic causes for YP becoming NEET (Pemberton, 2008; Salisbury, 2004).

One policy currently in place in Wales is the Youth Engagement Progression Framework (YEPF) which is non-statutory guidance that aims to provide clear examples of how youth services could set up their targeted support for YP aged between 14-17 (Welsh Assembly Government, 2013). This was intended to encompass all the needs of YP and to strengthen the accountability of different systems in order to provide better outcomes. This framework also includes the allocation of a lead worker within LAs who would have responsibility for ensuring all YP who are or at risk of becoming NEET receive the correct support.

2.6 Current provision

The literature surrounding current support and intervention is wide due to the vast array of professionals and services that can be involved, including teachers, teaching assistants, learning mentors, social workers, EPs, career services, youth services and charities (Arnold & Baker, 2013).

School-based support, alternative learning pathways and supportive relationships have been identified as important preventative strategies (Haughey, 2009; Parker et al., 2021; Pronk et al., 2020). Re-engagement programmes aim to re-integrate NEET YP back into EET, often using a combination of classroom and work-based approaches (Mawn et al., 2017; Nelson & O'Donnell, 2012). However, there is a general consensus that there is a need for more high-quality research about what does actually work to support YP who are or at risk of becoming NEET (Bloom, 2010; Mawn et al., 2017; Nelson & O'Donnell, 2012). Mawn et al (2017) argued that the NEET agenda is currently being tackled by professionals focused on social policy and economics and that those best placed to understand behaviour, including psychologists, are not often involved.

2.7 Summary of a Systematic Review of EP focused research supporting YP who are at risk of becoming NEET

In 1985, EPs first identified the importance of contributing to the support of YP who might be at risk of social exclusion and becoming NEET, however, to date there has been very little research that explores how this could be implemented in practice (Gabriel, 2015; Morris & Atkinson, 2018; Thompson & Leyden, 1985). Research has called for further consideration and understanding of the unique contribution that EPs could make to support this group of YP (Selfe, Pelter, & Relton, 2018).

In Part A of this thesis, a systematic literature review was conducted which aimed to synthesise and critically evaluate what current EP focused research has identified as important when working with YP who are at risk of becoming NEET. The thematic synthesis identified two overarching themes: "What is important to and for YP" and "What others can do to help" offering valuable insight into current support for YP both pre- and post-16. The subsequent discussion highlighted a number of implications for EPs which are applicable across the range of current approaches with individuals, groups, schools and wider systems (Welsh Government, 2016).

2.8 Rationale for Current Study

There is considerable evidence of the long-term, negative consequences for those who remain long-term unemployed (Bell & Blanchflower, 2011; Brynner & Parsons, 2002; Ralston et al., 2016). YP who are at risk of becoming NEET are often supported by a diversity of professionals who aim to provide both preventative and responsive strategies to guide transition into adulthood (Arnold & Baker, 2013; Nelson & O'Donnell, 2012). Currently, the application and contribution of psychology to current practice from EPs has been minimal (Mawn et al., 2017, Selfe et al., 2018). However,

upcoming changes to legislation regarding the role of EPs will reflect an extension of the age range to support YP up to the age of 25 in Wales (Department for Education, 2015; Welsh Government, 2018). This will require the EP profession to forge links with post-16 educational provisions, adult services and training and apprenticeship providers, including supporting YP who are at risk of becoming NEET (Atkinson, Dunsmuir, Lang, & Wright, 2015; Morris & Atkinson, 2018).

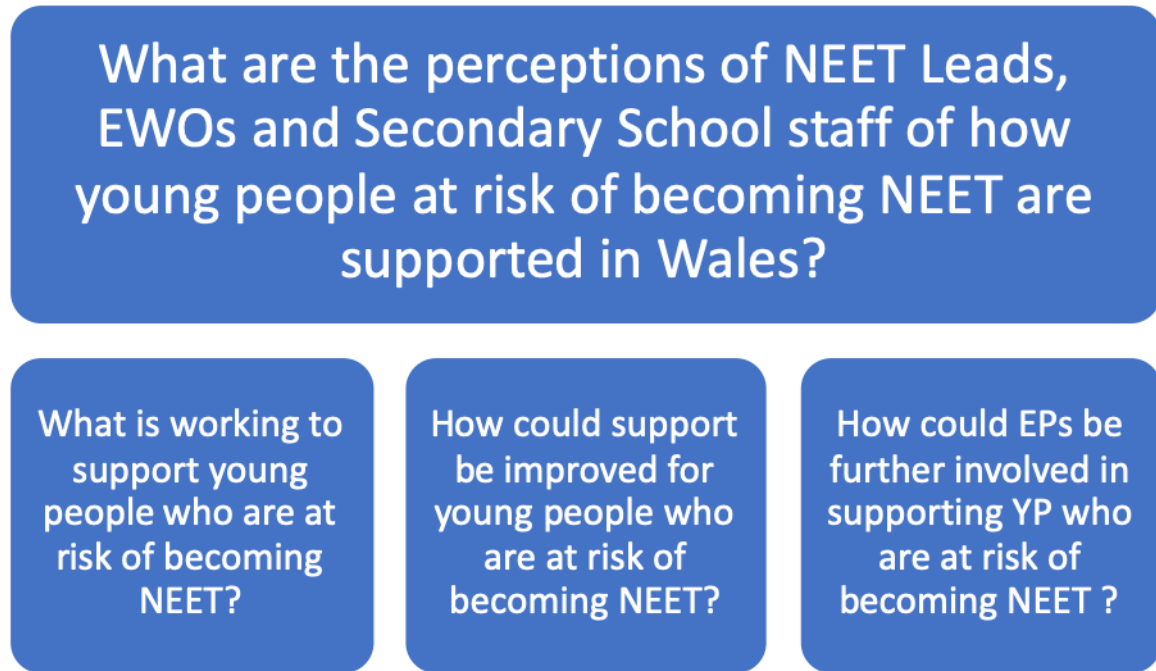
The outcomes of the systematic literature review helped to identify that there are unique contributions that EPs could make across various levels, from the individual, groups, EET provision and wider systems. However, none of the included studies were carried out in the context of Wales, which limits the application of these implications in the Welsh context. Consequently, this study will seek to explore current multi-professional practice surrounding YP who are at risk of becoming NEET in Wales, including what is working effectively, any difficulties or barriers, and where the EP role might best fit. This led to the development of the research questions, as seen in Figure 11 below.

2.9 Research Questions

This research will be guided by the following overarching question. Three subsidiary questions were also included to provide greater focus to the information being gathered.

Figure 11

One overarching and three subsidiary research questions of the current study.



3.0 Methodology

3.1 Ontological and epistemological positions

This research adopted a critical realist ontological position which acknowledges that “a pre-social reality exists but we can only ever partially know it” (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 26). This paradigm accepts that there is an underlying truth, i.e. what support helps YP who are at risk of becoming NEET. However, this truth can only be partially accessed through exploring individuals’ interpretations, i.e. how participants perceive the implementation of this support to YP. Adopting a critical realist ontology accepts that the “external reality” for participants “provides a foundation for knowledge” of what support should look like for YP who are at risk of becoming NEET (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 27).

The epistemological standpoint was Contextualism (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This theoretical approach accepts that there is not one “single reality” to find but that knowledge emerges from different local and situated contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 31). This epistemology acknowledges that whilst “no single method can get to the truth” it accepts that “knowledge will be true (valid) in certain contexts”

(Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 31). This epistemology adds value by appreciating that knowledge is situation dependent and that individual contexts may impact on the data that is collected and analysed (Madill et al., 2000). Wallat and Piazza (1988) identify that to address this in multi-professional research, it is important to include a breadth of perspectives when possible. In an attempt to explore contextual truths, participants were gathered from four different LAs in Wales, to ensure that localised viewpoints were included in the analysis of support for YP who are at risk of becoming NEET.

3.2 Design

Based on the ontological and epistemological stance, a qualitative design was adopted to explore the realities of professionals who currently support YP who are at risk of becoming NEET. A semi-structured interview methodology was developed to gather an in-depth understanding of individual viewpoints and local contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Willig, 2013). Consideration was given to the use of a focus group methodology, however it was felt this would reduce the ability to hear individual experiences if some participants were more dominant than others (Willig, 2013). A survey could have reached a broader range of participants, however the lack of flexibility to ask follow-up questions could have missed important information when exploring this relatively unique area of research (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Therefore, three professional groups across different Welsh LAs, who were already established in their roles to support YP who are at risk of becoming NEET, were chosen to be individually interviewed. The aim of the interviews was to elicit a rich understanding of practice and each professional's contribution to the NEET agenda in Wales.

3.3 Recruitment and Inclusion/Exclusion criteria

Due to the large array of professionals who are involved in supporting YP who are at risk of becoming NEET, consideration was undertaken about who should be involved in this research. Initial conversations with one LA helped to inform this choice and a brief summary of why these particular professional groups were chosen can be seen in Table 12 below.

Table 12

Summary of participant group selection

Professional Group	Why Selected
NEET Leads	They have strategic responsibilities for overseeing support for all YP who are or at risk of becoming NEET. This provided an overarching perspective of the current provision in each LA.
Education Welfare Officers	EWOs are the primary contact for YP who are showing signs of reduced attendance and engagement in school, which is an important indicator for later becoming NEET. EWOs work closely with families and are aware of the challenges that YP face engaging in school.
Secondary school staff	Secondary school staff are often in close and consistent contact with YP and will likely be the first professional to identify those who are beginning to disengage from education. They are the professional that YP often spend the most time with and are in an ideal position to implement support.

Inclusion criteria were applied to each individual participant group which are represented in Figure 12.

Figure 12

Inclusion criteria for the three target participant groups



3.4 Materials: Semi-structured interview schedules

Three semi-structured interview schedules were devised for the individual interviews: NEET Leads (see Appendix C), EWOs (see Appendix D) and school staff (see Appendix E). Adequate knowledge of current research and a general understanding of each professionals' current job role was gathered before the interview schedules were developed to ensure that the questions used were appropriate (Kallio et al., 2016). Interview schedules contained questions covering four main topics including YP at risk of becoming NEET, YP who become NEET, ALN and post-16 transition all with additional follow-up questions.

The use of a semi-structured interview helped to build rapport with participants and promote a natural conversation to gather a range of in-depth responses (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Willig, 2013). It was important to develop questions that could be used flexibly, if necessary, to support a flowing dialogue with limited researcher interference (Kallio et al., 2016; Willig, 2013). Care was taken to ensure open ended questions were used to allow genuine concepts from participants to emerge (Kallio et al., 2016).

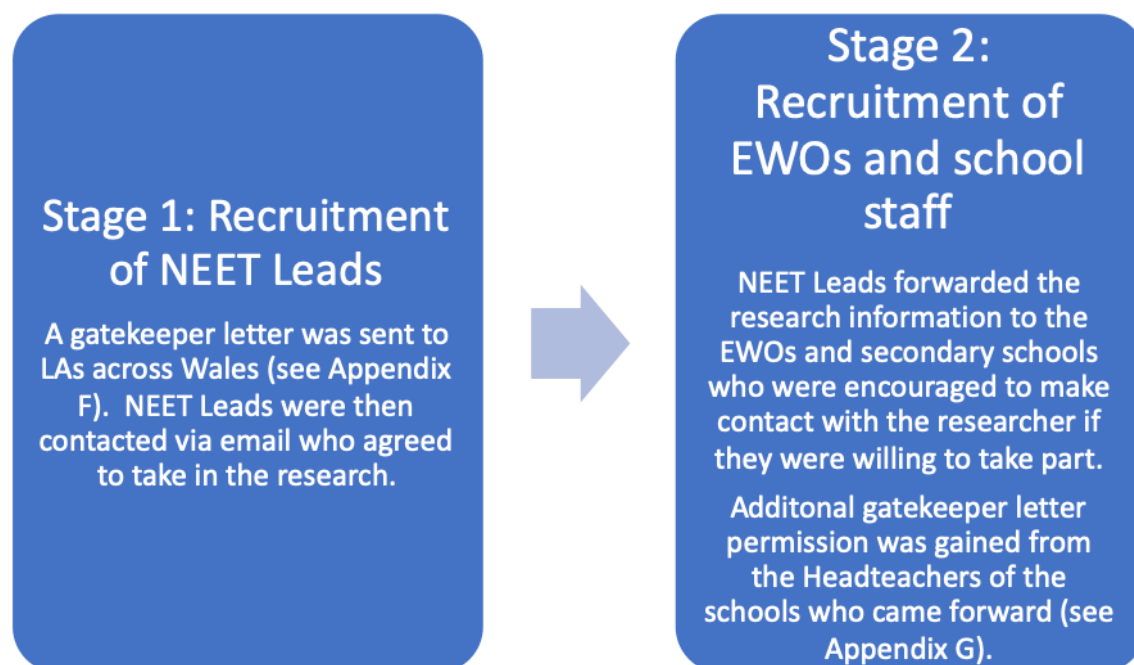
Due to the Covid-19 global pandemic, government restrictions prevented face-to-face interviews taking place. Therefore, all interviews were carried out virtually, using either Teams or Zoom video calling platforms. Although virtual interviews have been criticised for impacting negatively on the ability to build rapport with participants, the ease and flexibility of scheduling a convenient time for both participant and interviewee was greatly increased (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Hanna & Mwale, 2017; Willig, 2013). Further consideration of the use of virtual interviews will take place in Part C.

3.5 Participants

A purposeful sample was initially sought to recruit the NEET Lead participants who would generate an in-depth understanding of the research area and to satisfy the stipulated inclusion criteria (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Patton, 2015). This method of sampling ensured that participants were able to provide data full of information to be analysed (Patton, 2015). These participants were recruited from four different LAs based in Wales. A snowballing technique was then used to recruit EWOs and school staff participants (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Patton, 2015). This technique involved building up networks with the NEET leads who suggested further participants they thought would be suitable for participation in this research. This two-staged sampling process is outlined below.

Figure 13

Two stage process of recruiting participants



A total of ten participants across four different LAs in Wales took part in the research. These were made up of five NEET leads, two EWOs and three school staff. Information regarding the individual participants is summarised below (see Table 13).

Table 13

Participant Characteristics

Participant Number	Local Authority Code	Group	Job Title
P1	LA1	NEET Lead	Youth Engagement Progression Co-ordinator
P2	LA2	NEET Lead	Strategic Lead for NEETs
P3	LA2	NEET Lead	NEET Manager
P4	LA3	NEET Lead	Youth Engagement Progression Co-ordinator
P5	LA4	NEET Lead	Youth Engagement Progression Co-ordinator
P6	LA1	EWO	Education Welfare Officer
P7	LA4	EWO	Senior Education Welfare Officer
P8	LA2	School staff	Assistant Head Teacher
P9	LA1	School staff	Learning Mentor
P10	LA1	School staff	Assistant Head Teacher

The four LAs included in this research contained a breadth of both rural and urban areas in Wales. Individual LAs were anonymised, however some demographic information and statistics are contained in Table 14.

Table 14

Demographic information of participating LAs

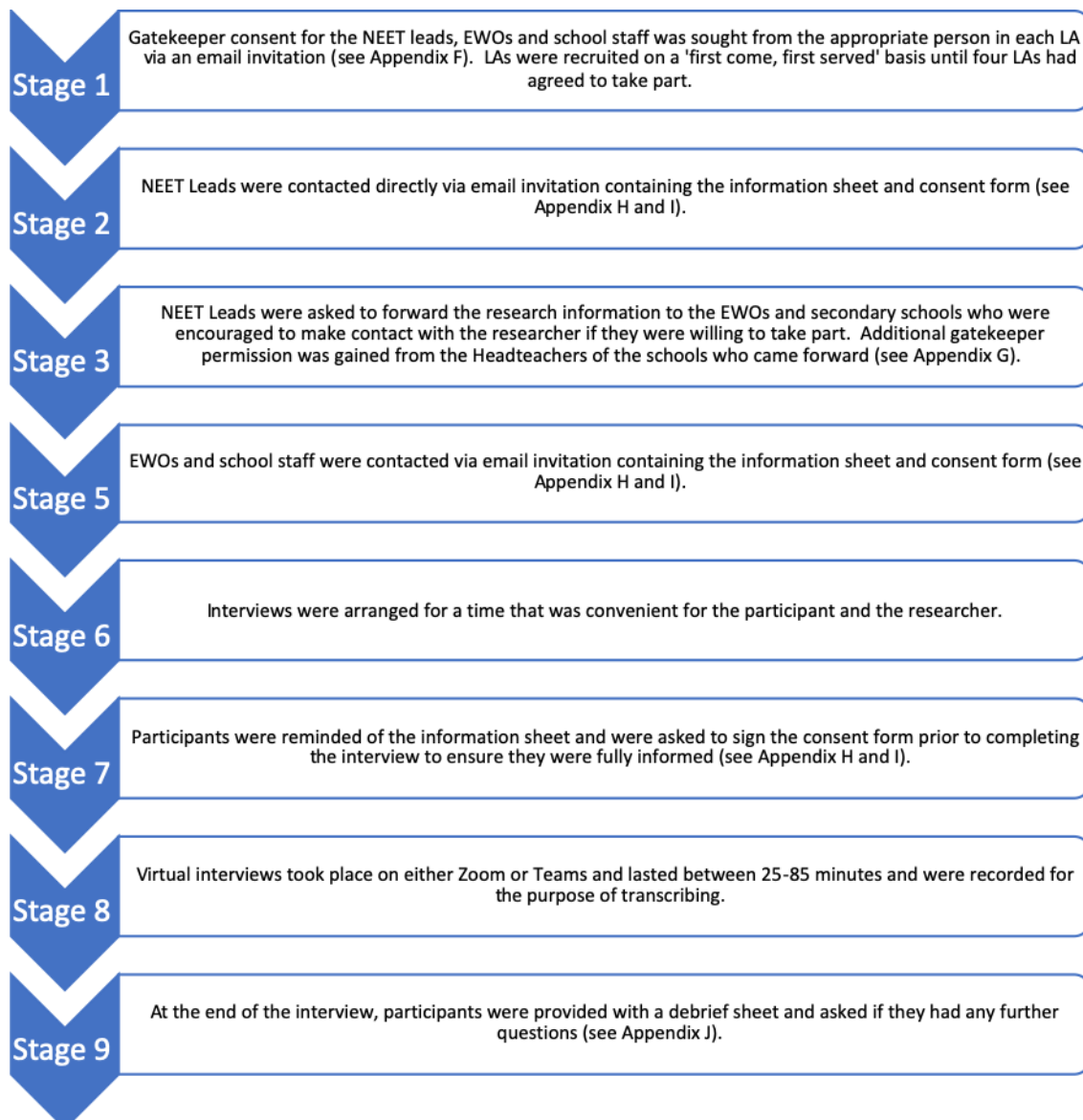
LA	Total Population (to nearest 10,000 as reported by Stats Wales 2020)	Percentage of YP living in poverty (to nearest percentage) (Stats Wales, 2021) <i>(Welsh average 22%)</i>	Percentage of YP who are NEET after Year 11 – Careers Wales (2019)
LA1	150,000	26%	0.9%
LA2	130,000	18%	1.4%
LA3	180,000	26%	2.4%
LA4	70,000	30%	1.9%

3.6 Procedure

See Figure 14 for a flow diagram of the procedure.

Figure 14

Flow diagram of research procedure



3.7 Pilot

All three semi-structured interview schedules were piloted in order to explore the validity of questions and ensure they were appropriate to elicit rich information related to the research topic (Kallio et al., 2016). As each schedule differed, pilot interviews took place with one participant from each professional group to support any necessary adjustments that might be needed to the questions (Kallio et al., 2016). Following this, minor amendments were made to the order and content of the questions to improve clarity and reduce some repetition of information being given.

As no major changes were made to the questions, all pilot interviews were included in the overall analysis. Informed consent was gained from all participants to include their interviews within the final data set.

3.8 Transcription

Individual interview recordings were orthographically transcribed within two weeks and pseudonyms were used to replace any personal or LA names mentioned to maintain anonymity. Recordings were listened to at least three times by the researcher whilst transcribing to ensure each one was accurate and of high quality. This process was important to ensure an in-depth analysis could be carried out and no information was lost (Willig, 2013). The transcription notation system outlined by Braun and Clarke (2013) was used to ensure all data was recorded consistently.

3.9 Analysis

Qualitative analysis of the data gathered from the individual interviews was carried out using the six stages of reflexive Thematic Analysis (TA) as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2020) (see Appendix K for the six stages). This approach was chosen due to its flexibility of application to the data to provide a rich and detailed account across three professional groups (Braun & Clarke, 2020; Willig, 2013). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was also considered, however this methodology requires an in-depth exploration of personal experiences which was felt to be inappropriate to this studies investigation of a breadth of professional practice (Willig, 2013).

An inductive form of TA was carried out which helped to ensure that coding and themes were “data-driven” and not “theory-driven” (Braun & Clarke, 2013, 2020). Adopting an inductive approach encourages the researcher to remain “grounded” in the data itself, removing influence from pre-existing questions, expectations or theoretical understanding as much as possible (Braun & Clarke, 2020). ‘Data familiarisation’ (TA stage one) took place by the researcher over a number of weeks to allow time and space for immersion and reflection of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2020). Systematic data coding (TA stage two) was supported using the software NVivo 12 Pro, which is a programme aimed to assist in the efficiency and thoroughness of coding (Braun & Clarke, 2013)(see Appendix L for an example). Further consideration of the strengths and weakness of using this software is discussed in Part C. Generating, developing, reviewing and refining themes (TA stages three, four and five) were carried out by the researcher manually.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

An ethics proposal for this research project was submitted and approved by the School Research Ethics Committee (SREC) in the School of Psychology. The ethical considerations and how these were addressed by the researcher for this study are displayed in Table 15.

Table 15

Ethical considerations of this research

Ethical Considerations	Researcher's Actions
Ensuring appropriate informed consent	<p>Gatekeeper permission was sought from the appropriate person within each individual LA (see Appendix F). Additional gatekeeper permission was sought from the head teachers of individual schools (see Appendix G). Individual consent for each participant was then gathered through a clear and explicit consent form (Appendix I). All participants were aware of the title, aim and objectives of the research prior to taking part and this information was provided in an information sheet (Appendix H). This allowed each participant to make an informed decision about whether to participate in this research.</p>
Confidentiality and Anonymity	<p>Participants were reminded not to mention individuals' names during the interviews, however if this did occur then names were replaced with a pseudonym at the point of transcription.</p> <p>Care was taken to ensure that data remained secure and confidential until it was transcribed, after which all held data was anonymous. To</p>

	<p>ensure anonymity, participants and LAs were allocated with a participant number (e.g. P1) and a LA number (e.g. LA1) within the transcripts and in the reporting of the findings.</p>
<p>Data Retention and Management</p>	<p>Individual interviews were recorded and stored on a laptop which was password protected and were only accessible to the researcher. The interview recordings were transcribed within two weeks of each individual interview, after which time the participant's data was anonymous. Participants were made aware that after this point they could no longer withdraw their data from the research. Each individual interview recording was then deleted and the transcriptions of the interviews will be kept by Cardiff University indefinitely.</p>
<p>Debrief</p>	<p>At the end of the interview, all participants were provided with a de-brief form (Appendix J) which provided the contact details of the researcher, supervisor and ethics committee. The participants were encouraged to contact any one of the above if they had any queries or concerns and they were thanked for taking part in the research.</p>

3.11 Validity and Reliability

Yardley (2000)'s framework was used to examine the validity and reliability of the qualitative analysis (see Table 16).

Table 16

Summary of the validity and reliability considered using Yardley (2000)'s framework

Core Principles	Evidence of consideration from the current study
Sensitivity to context	<p>A thorough narrative and systematic review was conducted of the current literature. This supported the researcher's awareness of the context and potential challenges in this subject area.</p> <p>The use of open-ended and probing questions in the semi-structured interview helped to elicit an accurate picture of the participant's individual experiences.</p> <p>A variety of different LAs were included to gain a breadth of different contexts and experiences.</p> <p>A research proposal was submitted and ethical approval was gained from the Cardiff University's Ethics Committee.</p> <p>Both the relevance and contribution to practice for a wide range of professionals, EPs and Welsh Government are discussed.</p>
Commitment and rigour	<p>Three different groups of professionals were recruited across four Welsh LAs to provide both breadth and depth to the data collected.</p>

	<p>Regular supervision took place throughout the research process.</p> <p>Kallio's (2016) framework was used to develop the semi-structured interview schedules.</p> <p>The researcher engaged in an in-depth exploration when considering the research methodology.</p> <p>Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six step TA (Braun & Clarke, 2020)(see in Appendix K). An inductive approach was adopted in an attempt to limit researcher bias and all themes and sub-themes were triangulated with the research supervisor.</p> <p>The researcher remained immersed in the data, including through transcription and coding/theming. Substantial time and commitment were given to data analysis to improve its rigour.</p>
<p>Coherence and transparency</p>	<p>The narrative and systematic literature review provided a clear rationale for the current study and its relevance to EP practice.</p> <p>The epistemological and ontological perspectives were carefully considered before the research design, procedure and methodology were developed. Further exploration of the decision processes are considered in Part C.</p>

	<p>TA was carried out using Braun and Clarke’s six steps and transparency of theme development can be found in Appendix M (Braun & Clarke, 2020).</p> <p>All aspects of the research were critically discussed and considered during regular supervision sessions which ensured continual reflection and reflexivity.</p>
<p>Impact and Importance</p>	<p>A gap in the literature was identified after a comprehensive scope of the current research and questions were developed to address this.</p> <p>The study helped to explore the current practice of three groups of professionals in Welsh LAs who support YP at risk of becoming NEET. These outcomes have informed implications for EP practice.</p>

4.0 Outcomes

4.1 Qualitative Results

The epistemological position of contextualism adopted in this research accepts that knowledge emerges from different situated contexts and each participant will bring their own “knowledge” of their individual experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2013). It is encouraged when conducting TA that the researcher should demonstrate “reflexive and thoughtful engagement with the analytic process” (Braun & Clarke, 2020, p. 594). With both these concepts in mind, it was decided that three separate Thematic Analyses would be carried out across the different professional groups. It was felt that the appreciation of each group’s unique experiences and contributions might be lost if only one TA was

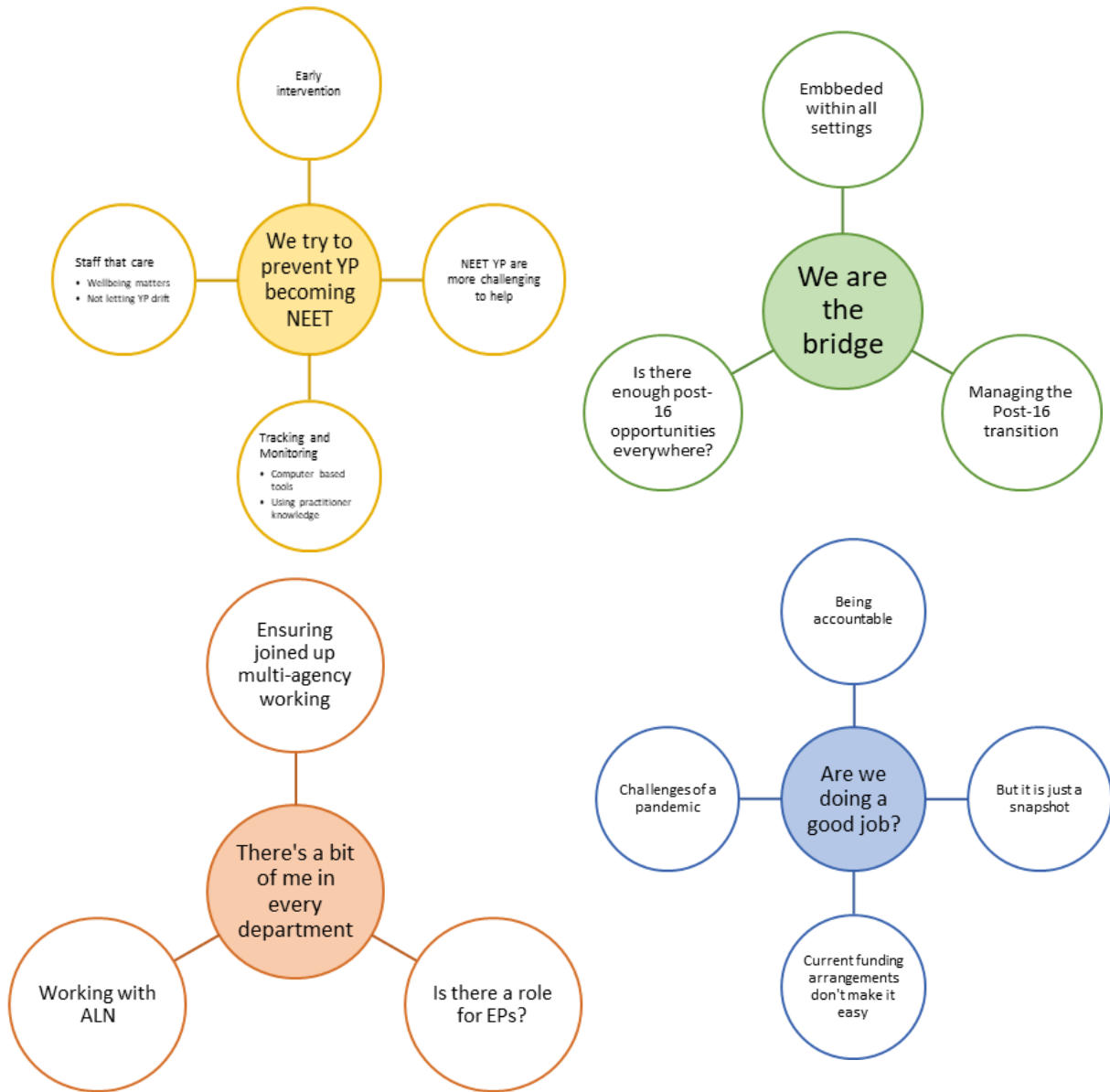
carried out with the dataset. The themes and sub-themes that have been constructed for each participant group will be discussed individually below. The research questions will be directly addressed in the discussion section.

4.2 Thematic Analysis of NEET Lead interviews

The four themes identified represented the messages given by the participants about their unique, overarching position within LAs to support this group of YP (see Figure 15). Participants identified that their role centres around prevention in order to support and increase YP's engagement with EET. Their professional position appears to be ideally positioned to bridge the crossover between pre-16 and post-16 provisions whilst contributing and co-ordinating an array of multi-agency support. The final theme highlights the accountability of the NEET lead to ensure that numbers of NEET YP are reduced and to monitor whether support is having an impact.

Figure 15

Thematic Map of the NEET Leads four themes and corresponding sub-themes



4.2.1 Theme 1: We try to prevent YP becoming NEET

Table 17

NEET Lead Theme 1 (We try to prevent YP becoming NEET) and sub-themes

Theme 1: We try to prevent YP becoming NEET	
<p>This theme reflects that trying to prevent YP from becoming NEET is paramount to the role of the NEET leads. The importance of early intervention pre-16 in preventing YP becoming disengaged from education was emphasised, highlighting that once YP become NEET, it is much more challenging for professionals to provide appropriate support. Adequate identification systems were necessary to identify, assess and monitor YP’s risk of becoming NEET, which then supported the planning of appropriate support strategies. The value of having passionate and caring staff in their teams who can build positive relationships with YP and ensure that they do not drift away from education was also acknowledged.</p>	
Subtheme	Illustrative Quotes
<p><u>Early intervention</u></p> <p>The importance of early intervention whilst YP are still attending school was seen as crucial. Participants felt that if provided pre-16, it was more likely that future disengagement would be avoided. However, it was acknowledged that current limitations on time and capacity affected their ability to carry this out effectively.</p>	<p><i>“if they’re on the cusp and you know we can see that the attainment and attendance is dropping then we can get involvement through I2A quite quickly within the schools” P3</i></p> <p><i>“Hopefully that we know about them really early on because through that mapping of the vulnerable learners group or through schools referrals through the early identification tool through everything we got set up for pre 16 hopefully we’ll know about them before they come too far away” P5</i></p>
<p><u>NEET YP are more challenging to help</u></p> <p>Supporting YP who have become NEET was</p>	<p><i>“everything is geared up around prevention we</i></p>

<p>seen as significantly more challenging. Provision often happens within educational settings, therefore if a YP is no longer attending, they will not have access to this. NEET leads also reported that some YP would choose not to engage with professionals and home visits and phone calls were also often unsuccessful.</p> <p>Alongside these difficulties, it was also acknowledged that YP who have become NEET will find it harder to re-engage the longer it continues.</p>	<p><i>don't want to get to a point where there's no I would say there's more endemic disengagement... they will find it harder to come back won't they" P2</i></p> <p><i>"we've got a good support package in place you know the difficulty for us is is like I said if they're not in school they can't access a lot of that support" P3</i></p> <p><i>"don't get me wrong some kids are almost uncontactable you go to their house you put a letter through their box you phone them their lines are dead makes it very difficult... I won't lie to you it can be very difficult very difficult" P4</i></p>
<p><u>Tracking and Monitoring</u></p> <p>All LAs currently have systems in place to help identify which YP are most at risk of becoming NEET. These methods are used to provide a better understanding about which YP should be prioritised for additional support and intervention. Two sub-sub themes are recognised as NEET leads named two methods that are often used to ensure that no YP who are at risk are missed.</p> <p>Computer based tools</p> <p>Computer-based programmes were used by all participants to identify the current risk level of YP becoming NEET. These used a variety of pre-identified risk factors, which included previous school exclusions, free school meals,</p>	<p><i>"that's how we kind of approach it with that two-pronged approach then of schools data and then the softer stuff for them" P5</i></p> <p><i>"we've got a traffic light system where if we flag em up as red it instantly puts on a minus 10 score on the IT data which instantly identifies them then as a risk of NEETs going forward" P3</i></p>

<p>ALN, Children Looked After (CLA), etc, to score and rate YP. This information would then be regularly used by NEET leads to inform the prioritisation and allocation of support. Participants discussed the convenience of these programmes and the ability for a wide range of professionals to contribute towards it.</p> <p>Using Practitioner knowledge</p> <p>Participants emphasised that although computer-based programmes were useful, supplementing this with practitioner knowledge was still important. Working in partnership with other colleagues to help identify YP at risk was necessary to fill any gaps a computer-based programme might miss out. Participants felt that this was an important addition to the identification process to ensure it was thorough.</p>	<p><i>but it is good that we can identify them pre 16 and and you know you use that scoring system then to say yes we can work with these” P3</i></p> <p><i>“a lot of the identification will happen at kind of school level cause they're in the schools being working in partnership with colleagues there as I said then you've got the kind of what I view is almost like the core aspect of it which is the identification school level but then you've got that peripheral stuff going on as well around things like EOTAS” P2</i></p> <p><i>“the early identification toolkit tells us it's a guide it's a good guide but it's not the same as knowing what's going on in the home for a young person” P1</i></p>
<p><u>Staff that care</u></p> <p>All NEET leads identified the passionate and driven staff that work within their teams to directly support YP. This is separated into two separate sub-sub themes.</p> <p>Wellbeing matters</p> <p>Providing regular opportunities for staff to be present in YP's lives allowed supportive</p>	<p><i>“it's being you know those overly mollycoddling support mentors” P3</i></p>

<p>relationships to be built, including safe spaces and drop-in sessions. NEET leads highlighted that their teams would go above and beyond for YP to ensure they received emotional support for any difficulties that they might be facing.</p> <p>Not letting YP drift</p> <p>The importance of developing consistent and supportive adult relationships was also identified as critical to prevent YP drifting away from EET. NEET leads emphasised that this is essential for some YP across the post-16 transition, to ensure they remain engaged. Interestingly, one participant identified that schools are not always able to put this support in place, and therefore professionals from the LA are key in ensuring YP receive this type of support.</p>	<p><i>“They will come in and do like a surgery in schools erm every week with those pupils so those selected pupils can go in and have a chat about welfare issues etc etc young person’s issues and they will do their utmost to support them” P5</i></p> <p><i>“it’s the hard yard it’s on these kids you know “what are you doing” not letting them drift” P2</i></p> <p><i>“it is an essential role because otherwise these young people they’ll get some support but they won’t get somebody grilling down on that support all the time for them and making sure that their futures secure because schools can’t do everything even with youth services they just can’t” P4</i></p>
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4.2.2 Theme 2: We are the bridge

Table 18

NEET Lead Theme 2 (We are the bridge) and sub-themes

Theme 2: We are the bridge
<p>This theme represents the unique position NEET leads hold with an overarching responsibility in both pre- and post-16 settings. Participants were able to become embedded across all provisions, providing a systemic view of the NEET picture in each LA. NEET leads were therefore able to operate a central monitoring system of transitions for YP from all settings to ensure everyone is</p>

registered at an appropriate post-16 destination and that they arrive at this intended setting in September. It was noted that this allows those who do not successfully transition to be more easily picked up and supported to re-engage. This theme also includes an important consideration about whether there is enough diversity and choice for YP who may not choose traditional post-16 routes.

Subtheme	Illustrative Quotes
<p><u>Embedded within all settings</u></p> <p>A commonality for all NEET leads was how their unique role within LAs allowed them to be embedded across all pre- and post-16 educational and training settings which positively influenced their ability to provide support for YP. This included working directly with schools as well as supporting and developing alternative pathways and curriculums for YP who find mainstream education difficult. Also described was involvement with post-16 providers and services to ensure that YP’s barriers to EET are reduced. This included providing practical resources and skills some YP might need, for example, a driving license, clothes or work equipment.</p>	<p><i>“we are embedded in the local authority we are embedded with education and inclusion we’re embedded at the schools um with colleges with the work based learning providers um ((pause)) yeah that’s what I’d say is positive really and really for us is we’ve already gotten good links forward so we are... we’ve got a big presence I’d say” P5</i></p> <p><i>“if someone’s at risk they’ll get all the support that I told you about just now in partnership with the school so whatever school and possibly myself thinks is appropriate they’ll get it” P4</i></p> <p><i>“we support em with whatever they need so you know suits work clothes PPE equipment if they’re going on sites erm anything they need for a start-up” P3</i></p>
<p><u>Managing the Post-16 transition</u></p> <p>Ensuring and monitoring that all YP are enrolled and signed up to a post-16 destination was identified as crucial. Additional support was offered to those unsure what to choose, including liaising with Careers Wales. For those</p>	<p><i>“through what we do hopefully through making sure it’s a good transition from comprehensive school into education employment training that they get positive experience and it’s right the first time around so they don’t come that far</i></p>

<p>most at risk of becoming NEET, participants highlighted the dedication and perseverance that can sometimes be required to ensure they have a destination.</p> <p>Additional support was implemented where necessary, which included facilitating pre-visits to post-16 settings to help increase a YP's engagement and enthusiasm to transition into these destinations. Summer support was also reported to be effective by some as it provided a smooth continuation between providers for some YP.</p> <p>Systems were in place to ensure that all YP who get lost and fail to arrive at their intended post-16 destination are picked up as soon as possible. Participants would find these YP and work with them to unpick reasons for non-attendance and implement appropriate support when necessary.</p>	<p>away" P5</p> <p><i>"an old thing for me is destination destination destination I want them to make sure that when September comes they going somewhere they doing something you know so I think we're quite good at that" P4</i></p> <p><i>"I know how well the trips work because we know what percentage of young people go into college or whatever after those trips... I wouldn't say it's changed their lives but it's impacted because a lot of them have gone to the college because they were swept away by the facilities down there" P4</i></p> <p><i>"if anybody is then missing for any reason we'll then go back out door knock again "what are you doing where are you why why haven't you done this why" and you know we'll be looking identifying all those then that are NEET erm and the reason why really" P3</i></p>
<p><u>Is there enough post-16 opportunities everywhere?</u></p> <p>Interestingly, two participants identified geographical and transport barriers which can impact on some YP's access to professional support and to a wide range of educational provision. These concerns included long travel times and poor transport options which were accepted as a significant hindrance to some YP's engagement. One participant also acknowledged that this issue would affect YP</p>	<p><i>"for these young people that are NEET who are far away from the workplace are far away from employment and you know could have a range of barriers involved to think that they have to sit at home and you know "ahh the only time you can have a meeting is if you come to us that means you've got to get on trains and buses"" P3</i></p>

<p>from certain geographical areas of Wales differently, with those living in larger rural boroughs impacted more than those who live in a city.</p>	<p><i>“The size of our borough its its terrain and stuff and the provision where it is that is the biggest challenge you know now erm the the I I’m I’m constantly on about this to anybody that listens to me you know you know the bus times you know if a kid has to change two buses to travel five or six miles you know we’re in the 21st century we should be better than that now you know” P4</i></p>
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4.2.3 Theme 3: There’s a bit of me in every department

Table 19

NEET Lead Theme 3 (There’s a bit of me in every department) and sub-themes

<p>Theme 3: There’s a bit of me in every department</p>	
<p>This theme reflects the broad and diverse range of professionals that are involved supporting YP who are at risk of becoming NEET. NEET leads attempted to navigate these different departments to try and provide co-ordinated and tailored support, however this was not always easy. EPs contributed to these multi-agency teams by bringing an in-depth understanding of YP’s needs and developing bespoke support, however current time restrictions meant this was not always possible. Specialist ALN teams and advisors were also included in providing extra support to pupils who had a recognised ALN.</p>	
<p>Subtheme</p>	<p>Illustrative Quotes</p>
<p><u>Ensuring joined up multi-agency working</u></p> <p>The wide and diverse range of professionals and services that are involved in the NEET agenda was acknowledged by all. This included organisations and charities both within and outside of the LA. NEET leads are required to</p>	<p><i>“It is a hugely diverse I work with there’s a bit of me in every department in education every part of education has a part of me in and a and a huge link of organisations outside” P4</i></p>

<p>navigate and co-ordinate these multi-agencies to ensure everyone works together, however it can be difficult to create cohesion when there are so many roles and responsibilities.</p> <p>Information sharing protocols were also reported to cause some difficulties, especially across post-16 transition when information about YP cannot be directly shared with the intended destination. Although these systems have to be in place due to GDPR legislation, it was acknowledged that this does create delays for some support to be implemented. Participants highlighted that this is an increasing problem when working with YP aged 18-25 due to different practices that are currently in place.</p>	<p><i>“there's partnership forums across all services and they're voluntary to protect the um charity organizations there's so many um services out there they're all doing different bits of work contributing towards the same reasons and whilst we you know my role actively looks at that and tries to bridge all of that” P5</i></p> <p><i>“so the learning providers aren't allowed the information because obviously its local authority information” P1</i></p>
<p><u>Is there a role for EPs?</u></p> <p>Three participants highlighted that EPs contribute a deeper understanding of a YP's needs which can be used to develop bespoke and tailored support packages. By providing the most appropriate support, this could prevent disengagement from EET in the future. One participant also identified that EPs should provide training and supervision to the youth workers who directly work with often the most challenging to engage YP.</p> <p>However, current difficulties regarding EP support centred around having limited time allocations and high costs. Systems for EPs to contribute were not often fully established and</p>	<p><i>“we do need that extra that extra tier of EP involvement because the EP what we've written in as well is that the EPs will help train and give some of our youth workers supervision as well because obviously when you start looking into the mental health agenda youth workers are only qualified to do so much” P1</i></p> <p><i>“she was able to allocate case work out to specific EPs to get recommendations write reports that type of thing really useful actually cause then we can begin to develop a kind of bespoke pathway forward for that individual... we've gotta tailor the the learning package to their needs otherwise we're just going to</i></p>

<p>one participant expressed uncertainty about where this might fit. It appeared that EPs did not tend to become involved with the NEET agenda unless there was a YP with an identified ALN.</p>	<p><i>disengage again” P2</i></p> <p><i>“EPs it’s more around time you know they every school has only got an allotted amount of time so quite often that causes a bit of an animosity within the group” P3</i></p>
<p><u>Working with ALN</u></p> <p>ALN was included as a risk factor in the identification systems for YP at risk of becoming NEET. The access to support for ALN pupils often worked in the same way, although some participants acknowledged the benefit of dedicated ALN teams and specialist careers advisors.</p>	<p><i>“we work closely with a specialist careers advisor whose responsible for ALN and that woman is so driven sort of leaves no stone unturned to make sure that they have a destination” P4</i></p> <p><i>“obviously their experience within the ALN team is much better than mine around ALN and much better around a youth worker or a careers advisor... so they’re case loaded almost separately unless there is something they feel they would get out of the projects or the work that I do” P1</i></p>

4.2.4 Theme 4: Are we doing a good job?

Table 20

NEET Lead Theme 4 (Are we doing a good job?) and sub-themes

<p>Theme 4: Are we doing a good job?</p>
<p>This theme incorporates the accountability and responsibility NEET leads hold for the numbers of NEET YP in each LA in Wales. The accuracy and reliability of current NEET prevalence in Wales was</p>

questioned, alongside the difficulties with the current funding arrangements, often allocated through grants. A final consideration within this theme highlights the challenges that the Covid-19 pandemic has brought and the impact this might have on the numbers of YP who are NEET.

Subtheme	Illustrative Quotes
<p><u>Being Accountable</u></p> <p>All NEET leads discussed the high level of accountability they face within their role which requires them to demonstrate that figures about YP who are or at risk of becoming NEET are improving. This monitoring happens at both a LA and Welsh Government level requiring NEET leads to justify and explain current provision and whether it is working.</p>	<p><i>“I gotta go in front of scrutiny I gotta go in front of the board and and with these figures and and answer questions like you're asking me now right out “why you know why have X amount of kids not being engaged with what's then happened what are the measures that we're putting in place” you know when you've got that high level of accountability in local authority level” P2</i></p> <p><i>“quarterly monitoring that's going to be down on em like a ton of bricks if they're not doing what they're asking of them” P3</i></p>
<p><u>But it is just a snapshot</u></p> <p>The current system to measure numbers of NEET YP in Wales is through a once or twice yearly snapshot. It was generally felt that this measure fails to consider the real-life circumstances that change all year round for YP and that it does not capture the true picture of NEETs within LAs.</p>	<p><i>“I would change how it's recorded to Welsh government I have got an issue with that because they just effectively the whole kind of snapshot of whether a young person is in sustained provision beyond Year 11 if you like is just one snapshot that's taken on the 31st October once they're into Year 12 and I wonder about that” P2</i></p> <p><i>“it's only a snapshot of the time that is done so we know like circumstances can change so they can get excluded three days after that tool in</i></p>

	<i>our data is taken” P5</i>
<p><u>Current funding arrangements don't make it easy</u></p> <p>NEET leads reflected that part of their role includes managing funding and provision that has been allocated to provide the most effective support for YP. Current finance arrangements are grant funded, which come with certain protocols and targets that need to be abided by for LAs to receive the money. Participants acknowledged that this causes various difficulties as it restricts both creativity and autonomy of how they want to implement support within their own individual LA.</p>	<p><i>“it has been grant funded for years now it's it's like a game isn't it there are parameters to it and you can you can move your your pieces within those given parameters it is like a giant chess board you can't go outside of them if you go outside of them you don't get your grant funding so you have to temper your erm your aspirations and your creativity to a degree because you want you you can't function without the money erm it's just it's a simple it's a simple equation you need the money and you have to abide by other protocols that are outlined” P2</i></p>
<p><u>Challenges of a pandemic</u></p> <p>This research was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic and all NEET leads reflected on the potential impact of this on YP. All identified ways in which their normal working arrangements had changed and that support for YP was now having to be managed using virtual methods. As a result of school closures, YP staying at home for long periods of time and reduced employment opportunities, participants predicted that the numbers of YP who are NEET will increase.</p>	<p><i>“covid is a massive risk I can't say that it isn't it's huge what you've got now with like a good few months of kids not been in school providers haven't been in so things like that you know there's a lot of lot of discussion around erm how we are we negotiate some of these challenges” P2</i></p> <p><i>“you know NEETs figures will go up and effectively this year because of COVID etc NEET figures will rise across the board” P3</i></p> <p><i>“Youth unemployment is on the up job opportunities are massively decreasing um and</i></p>

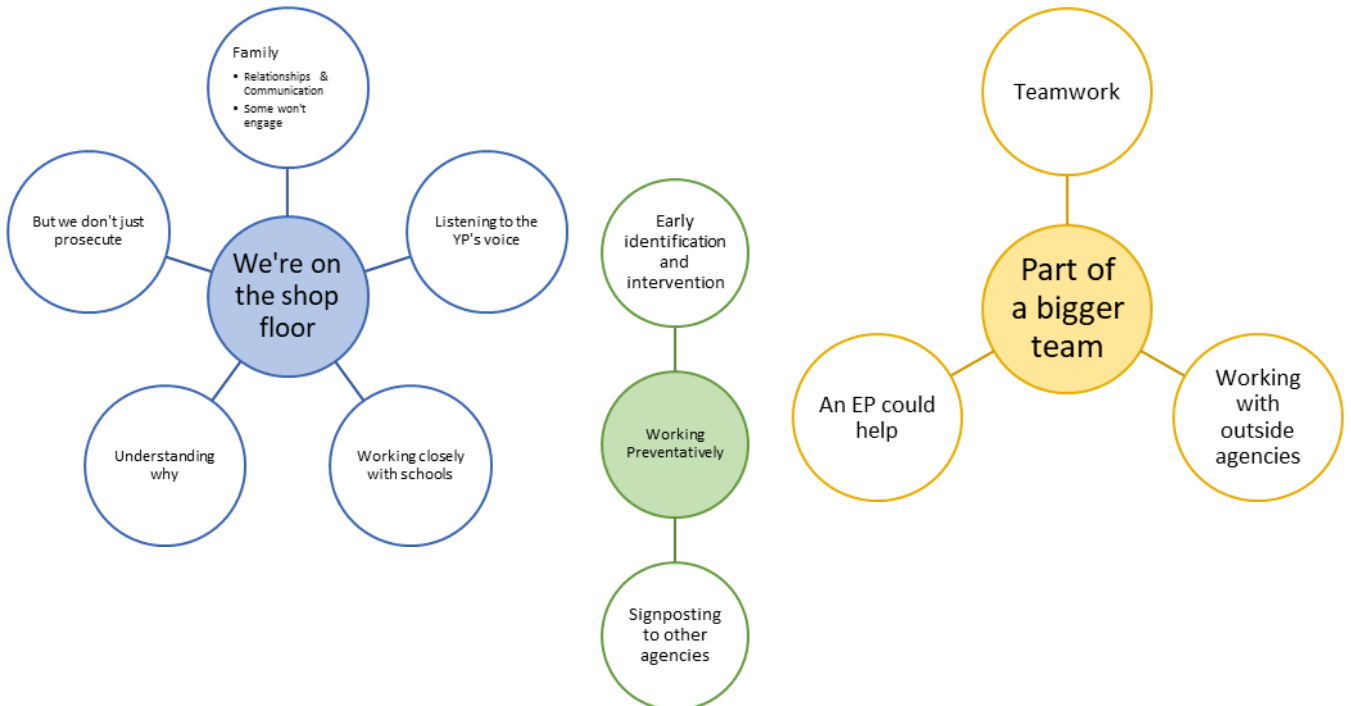
	<p><i>young people between the ages of 16 to 24 are the ones impacted most at the moment by Covid for jobs” P5</i></p>
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4.3 Thematic Analysis of Education Welfare Officer interviews

EWOs play an important role in supporting pupils who are at risk of becoming NEET and three themes were identified from the two participants who took part in this research (see Figure 16). A key component of the EWO role is working on the ground directly with YP, their families and schools to support and promote better attendance. They work preventatively with YP and are part of a wider group of professionals who work together to implement appropriate and tailored support.

Figure 16

Thematic Map of the EWOs three themes and corresponding subthemes



4.3.1 Theme 1: We're on the shop floor

Table 21

EWO Theme 1 (We're on the shop floor) and sub-themes

Theme 1: We're on the shop floor	
<p>This theme reflects the direct role that EWOs have supporting YP, families and schools to promote a positive change in attendance. Building relationships, communicating with families and listening to the YP's views are an important part of their role. EWOs also regularly work closely with schools to monitor attendance and ensure that pupils are supported as early as possible. This involvement allows EWOs to acquire an understanding of the barriers and provide support accordingly, differing from the traditional perception of EWO's who prosecute families when a YP's attendance does not improve.</p>	
Subtheme	Illustrative Quotes
<p><u>Family</u></p> <p>EWOs identified that a major component of their role includes having direct professional involvement with families, such as visiting their own homes. This theme is split into two separate sub-sub themes which recognise how challenging this can be.</p> <p>Relationships and communication</p> <p>One participant emphasised the importance of building positive relationships and developing open lines of communication with families in order to increase engagement. This can result in families being more likely to confide in EWOs about issues they are currently experiencing which they may not have done with other</p>	<p><i>"I suppose we're a bit like hairdressers they confide in you the parents you know and you gotta get them onside to move forward" P6</i></p> <p><i>"communication is key with all of them it's keeping the lines of communication open" P6</i></p>

<p>professionals.</p> <p>Some won't engage</p> <p>However, despite their best efforts, some families are not willing to engage with EWOs which creates a significant challenge to increasing YP's attendance in school.</p>	<p><i>"Oh the biggest challenges are the families that aren't willing to engage with you" P6</i></p>
<p><u>Listening to the YP's voice</u></p> <p>For EWOs, their role also included ensuring the voice of the pupil is listened to and is heard. This helps to improve understanding about their current barriers to attending school and how support could be improved.</p>	<p><i>"you have to try and understand the views of the pupil" P6</i></p> <p><i>"as you get to know the children... what their barriers are and how you can support them better" P7</i></p>
<p><u>Working closely with schools</u></p> <p>Participants highlighted the close relationships that are built with schools when working together to implement support for YP, such as through regular meetings and communication to monitor progress.</p>	<p><i>"we all work very closely together the communication is amazing you know and if it if Billy is not in school for example or Joe Bloggs schools will let let us know... and then we can see we have meetings and we'll... um look at the attendance if there's an improvement we're doing cartwheels if there's a decline then we look at the next step" P6</i></p>
<p><u>Understanding why</u></p> <p>Due to working closely with YP and their families, EWOs are able to develop a holistic picture and insight of a YP's life. This information can then be used to improve</p>	<p><i>"because we're on the shop floor seeing how the families live" P6</i></p> <p><i>"it's quite useful really when it comes to</i></p>

<p>understanding about a YP's barriers to attending school so effective and individualised support can be implemented.</p>	<p><i>recognizing children and having that holistic picture of em because you quite often well oh well they'll discuss so and so with the families you tend to get a good picture" P7</i></p>
<p><u>But we don't just prosecute</u></p> <p>Participants reflected that although prosecuting parents for non-attendance is part of their role, this is only used as a last resort. EWOs will attempt everything possible, including liaising with other agencies, to implement support for families and YP to prevent prosecutions taking place. The role of the EWO now primarily involves finding the best support for families and for YP to improve engagement with school.</p>	<p><i>"the ones that we have to go down the legal procedure with but that is like the last... the last um nail in the coffin we try to do everything we can before it does go to prosecution" P6</i></p> <p><i>"in the past they've always been prosecute prosecute prosecute for those who don't engage with us but now it's about seeing what else is out there or supportive agencies to work with the children" P7</i></p>

4.3.2 Theme 2: Working preventatively

Table 22

EWO Theme 2 (Working preventatively) and sub-themes

<p>Theme 2: Working preventatively</p>	
<p>The preventative aspect of an EWO's work, through identifying YP who are beginning to disengage from education in order that early intervention can be implemented, was reflected in this theme. This can include signposting to relevant agencies to ensure that YP receive the most relevant and appropriate support.</p>	
<p>Subtheme</p>	<p>Illustrative Quotes</p>
<p><u>Early Identification and Intervention</u></p> <p>One participant spoke about the importance of</p>	<p><i>"we identify the challenging families we identify</i></p>

<p>identifying all YP and families who may become disengaged with education in the future. Regular communication and close monitoring will then take place to ensure that relevant support is in place.</p> <p>EWOs help to provide and implement early intervention to YP and their families and aim to reduce their risk of becoming NEET. Part of their support is helping YP to achieve qualifications before they leave school into further EET.</p>	<p><i>pupils that could possibly be disengaged with education” P6</i></p> <p><i>“education welfare perspective early intervention is paramount to try to stop the effects of children becoming NEET” P6</i></p> <p><i>“I’m the one that’s trying to make sure they’re in school to get these qualifications before they leave school” P6</i></p>
<p><u>Signposting to other agencies</u></p> <p>Participants both acknowledged that referring YP to other agencies and professionals was a necessary part of the EWO role. By doing this, YP received tailored and individualised support appropriate to the current barriers they were facing.</p>	<p><i>“so if they feel that that relevant agency you know would be beneficial to that pupil to to so they they don’t become a NEET and then that’s sign posted you know” P6</i></p> <p><i>“obviously we’re a referral agency we can’t pick up all that support...” P7</i></p>

4.3.3 Theme 3: Part of a bigger team

Table 23

EWO Theme 3 (Part of a bigger team) and sub-themes

Theme 3: Part of a bigger team
<p>EWOs are part of a wider team of professionals that support YP facing barriers to attending school. This includes working with other colleagues and services within the LA as well as liaising with other agencies and charities. Support from an EP was identified to be a valuable addition to</p>

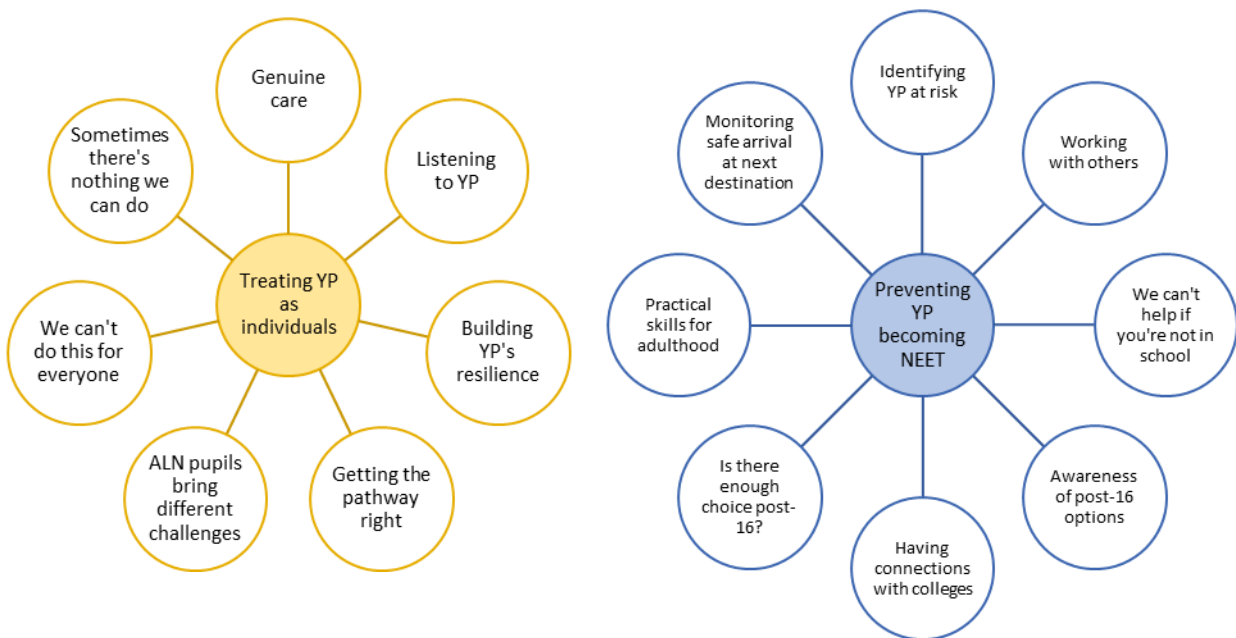
this team.	
Subtheme	Illustrative Quotes
<p><u>Teamwork</u></p> <p>EWOs reflected that their role sits within a big jigsaw of the LA system to provide support for YP and working together with other professionals in the LA is effective. This teamwork helps provide YP with co-ordinated and effective support.</p>	<p><i>“Yeah so it's a big jigsaw and it all pieces together you know and I'm a bit of that jigsaw puzzle as well” P6</i></p> <p><i>“whoever's got the best links with that child...” P7</i></p>
<p><u>Working with outside agencies</u></p> <p>The number of outside agencies that are available to support YP is continually increasing and changing. Part of the EWO role is navigating this and learning about these new services so they can be referred to if appropriate.</p>	<p><i>“they're developing new agencies all the time” P6</i></p> <p><i>“I've done housing referrals and do you know things I've never worked with before” P7</i></p>
<p><u>An EP could help</u></p> <p>Both participants recognised the role of the EP in supporting YP and schools to better understand the needs of some children. This included carrying out assessments and providing tailored strategies for schools to implement in order to improve a pupil's engagement in school. Interestingly, one participant discussed that EPs were not always being appropriately used.</p>	<p><i>“sometimes I find there's a big gap there with some of our schools so they're not using EPs” P7</i></p> <p><i>“I think where there's behaviour issues and you know additional learning needs I think schools need to make more appropriate use of their EP um... cause I think that is crucial to understanding some of these children” P7</i></p>

4.4 Thematic Analysis of School Staff interviews

Two themes were identified about current practice in secondary schools from three school staff interviews (see Figure 17). Two assistant head teachers took part who both held additional management responsibility to monitor YP who are at risk of becoming NEET and oversee the implementation of appropriate support. The third participant was a learning mentor who directly supported YP who were identified as requiring extra support and guidance in the lead up to the post-16 transition. All spoke at length about the support that is implemented in their schools which focused on treating each YP as an individual and ensuring pupil-centred practice was carried out as much as possible. Participants also identified wider school systems that were in place to ensure that YP did not become NEET after they left.

Figure 17

Thematic map of the school staff's two themes and corresponding sub-themes



4.4.1 Theme 1: Treating YP as individuals

Table 24

School staff Theme 1 (Treating YP as individuals) and sub-themes

Theme 1: Treating YP as individuals	
<p>School staff emphasised the importance of ensuring YP are seen as individuals through acknowledging personal differences and providing unique and tailored support, highlighting current processes that allow a YP’s views and aspirations to be heard. This support was found to build resilience and confidence to engage with education. An important strategy included ensuring that pupils can access the best and most appropriate learning pathway and post-16 destination for them, including for YP with an identified ALN.</p> <p>However, the practical difficulties that arise were also highlighted, recognising that it is not always possible to provide bespoke and effective support due to current funding, capacity, and availability. Additionally, for the YP who face the most significant barriers, school staff felt there is often little they can offer to help.</p>	
Subtheme	Illustrative Quotes
<p><u>Genuine care</u></p> <p>All participants acknowledged the genuine care, understanding and patience that goes into supporting individual YP, despite the challenge that this can sometimes bring. Participants highlighted their commitment to ensuring that every YP has the best start possible while in school and will work hard to achieve this.</p>	<p><i>“we all work incredibly hard and sort of you know we are genuinely nice guys trying to do our best for kids” P10</i></p> <p><i>“for every kid that’s a pain in the backside there’s a reason why they’re a pain in the backside um so we’re I think we’re I think we’re very patient staff I think we are really helpful staff you know not all the time obviously but I think we are yeah I think we are genuinely committed to doing the best” P10</i></p>

<p><u>Listening to YP</u></p> <p>Opportunities were provided to YP when staff would take the time to listen to their thoughts, feelings, and aspirations. These could then be used to inform pupil-centred practice and support. This took place during informal times of the school day or through more formal methods of appointing mentors, facilitating 1:1 meetings or using pupil-voice techniques.</p>	<p><i>“it is really pupil centred and it is not result centred” P10</i></p> <p><i>“There’s no point continuing to do stuff if it’s not having the impact and that can be through peer that could be through like pupil voice it could be through just engagement you know with them in a coaching and mentoring capacity” P8</i></p>
<p><u>Building YP’s resilience</u></p> <p>All school staff highlighted the importance of building a YP’s resilience and confidence and the positive effect this can have on engagement both in school and a future post-16 destination. It was acknowledged that some YP will need more encouragement and support from adults than others but emphasised that showing belief in a YP’s abilities is an important part of their role.</p>	<p><i>“we try and build up their strength so that actually academically they feel strong enough to go to a college and be at the top of one group of pupils rather than be at the bottom of a sixth form group of pupils” P8</i></p> <p><i>“some just need a bit of encouragement and somebody to say “yeah that’s a good idea you can do that” just somebody to believe in them” P9</i></p>
<p><u>Getting the pathway right</u></p> <p>The use of the right alternative pathways and curriculums were described to transform the engagement of some YP. Staff used various systems to identify YP as early as possible and ensure they were on the most appropriate educational pathway for them. Participants highlighted that large comprehensive schools do not suit the needs of everyone and using</p>	<p><i>“identifying those pupils in Year 7 really sort of focuses or gives us much more time to sort of get those pathways and those courses right so by the end of the year by the end of the Year 11 um again the risk of that pupil being a NEET is substantially reduced” P10</i></p> <p><i>“a big sort of comprehensive school that</i></p>

<p>alternative providers and qualifications is necessary to support some YP's engagement and wellbeing.</p> <p>The importance of "getting the pathway right" also included supporting YP to choose appropriate post-16 destinations. School staff worked together with YP to discuss and explore the different available options and felt that YP were then more likely to make suitable decisions about which destination might suit them best.</p>	<p><i>doesn't work for them they are a path to going nowhere and if you get them on that right alternative pathway um almost without exception or actually completely without exception for the last couple of years that pupil has just been transformed by that pathway"</i></p> <p>P10</p> <p><i>"the more I do this the more I think that actually the the absolute key function of this latter stage of school is setting yourself up with a pathway that is going to work for you um and that is all about preventing preventing being a NEET which is kind of worst-case scenario at the end of Year 11"</i></p> <p>P10</p>
<p><u>ALN pupils bring different challenges</u></p> <p>Pupils with an identified ALN were described as having access to the same support mechanisms as other pupils. However, these YP may also receive additional specialist support from different professionals or provision that might suit their needs better. Interestingly, one participant identified that choices of alternative pathways or curriculums and post-16 destinations are more limited for YP with an ALN.</p>	<p><i>"we'll try and work out "okay that pupil there yeah they've got I've got a few challenges there I think I think ALN is the clear sort of support mechanism... so we identify the challenges and we try and match up the where the where best the provision is going to come from"</i></p> <p>P10</p> <p><i>"they do get extra but but but it's more of a form of formalized extra I would suggest there's more there's a more formalised support mechanism around them if they've got a registered barrier"</i></p> <p>P8</p> <p><i>"we would have less options for for um an ALN pupil"</i></p> <p>P10</p>

<p><u>We can't do this for everyone</u></p> <p>It was acknowledged that although individualised approaches for learning and engagement are successful, this is not possible for all YP. Participants identified that increasing financial and time pressures contribute to restrictions on who can receive these. School staff felt that the needs of YP are becoming more complex, yet schools have not been provided with any additional financial support to reflect this.</p>	<p><i>“the extreme examples that for me are easy um the the kind of like the more mundane examples that's where we are constrained by sort of financial limitations or we can't do radical for everybody” P10</i></p> <p><i>“I think that what's happened is children's psychology of children and you'll know best has changed and I think that... that means that we are now fighting a battle which is much more difficult with the same resources” P8</i></p>
<p><u>Sometimes there's nothing we can do</u></p> <p>There are some pupils who have experienced extreme challenges in their lives and as a result face significant barriers to attending school. Participants felt that for these YP, there was minimal chance of their support having a positive impact.</p>	<p><i>“there are situations like that where where really really really our chance of exceeding success or achieving success are pretty minimal” P10</i></p> <p><i>“there are pupils whose challenges are are so acute that you know and like really really really really pretty majorly extreme pupil's they are out there and there are some pupils who we certainly do know that this is going to be we are really really up against it” P10</i></p>

4.4.2 Theme 2: Preventing YP becoming NEET

Table 25

School staff Theme 2 (Preventing YP becoming NEET) and sub-themes

Theme 2: Preventing YP becoming NEET	
<p>School staff felt they played a significant part in working with YP to prevent them becoming NEET when they transition into the post-16 sector, achieved through identifying those YP who are at risk so support can be provided. Participants acknowledged that this can be very difficult to implement for YP who are not currently attending school. Preparation for post-16 transition included raising awareness of the different options and building connections and relationships with local colleges. However, the sufficiency of diverse opportunities for YP to suit all needs and abilities was questioned. Part of the post-16 transition also involved providing YP with practical skills that they might need once they leave school. A final responsibility school staff adopt is making sure YP arrive at their intended destination.</p>	
Subtheme	Illustrative Quotes
<p><u>Identifying YP at risk</u></p> <p>Identification systems are used to assess YP using pre-determined risk factors to work out who most needed preventative support. One participant felt that this rating system did not always capture the complexities of YP's lives and could miss some pupils who may need support.</p> <p>Processes were also in place to identify pupils who may not have an appropriate or achievable post-16 destination and were therefore deemed at risk of dropping out.</p>	<p><i>"a diagnostic tool um which I refer to as the NEET sheet but essentially it gives you a a rag system that gets sent to the ((LA name))... and if we red them that gives us extra funding or provision that we can put in place for that child and ((LA name)) will help us with that... um that's what one of the the ways in which we do it and so we use all of that I suppose anecdotal um parental summative data academic data chuck it in the mix and try and work out where each and every child is going and if they're in danger" P8</i></p> <p><i>"I don't think it is a successful system because</i></p>

	<p><i>those you can predict leaving school with good jobs or good outlooks as I've said life gets in the way with a lot of them and it just doesn't turn out as we predict it does" P9</i></p> <p><i>"they'd been accepted to courses in college but three of them we felt were they weren't right for em so they might go to college and then realize that there wasn't right and then drop out" P8</i></p>
<p><u>Working with others</u></p> <p>Multi-agency support was identified as important when supporting the YP most at risk of becoming NEET. School staff relied upon professional services within LAs and other outside agencies to provide pupils with as much specialist help as possible. Some YP were involved with many professionals which required school staff to regularly collaborate and feedback progress.</p>	<p><i>"so we will use Ed Psychs or we will use ALN LSAs we'll use outside agencies like behaviour clinics to try and help us to work with those children while they're in school to get as much as we possibly can get them" P8</i></p> <p><i>"we would just make sure that every single external agency that we can possibly get in to add specialist help here is is in we would make sure that we we sort of never give up on that pupil" P10</i></p>
<p><u>We can't help if you're not in school</u></p> <p>A lot of the current support that can be implemented requires YP to attend an educational provision. Therefore, for those who do not attend, it is increasingly hard for school staff to provide them with the help and support they need. This means that participants rely on receiving additional assistance from the LA to support these YP to</p>	<p><i>"when somebody doesn't wanna come into school it becomes increasingly difficult to get them things and and so we have seen a rise in individuals that do refuse and that that's quite often when we have to liaise with ((LA name)) and the local education authority like other schools do to try and get their assistance um in getting grades and getting qualifications" P8</i></p>

<p>achieve any qualifications.</p>	<p><i>“the others are just totally disappeared that then is in the hands of the authority” P9</i></p>
<p><u>Awareness of post-16 options</u></p> <p>One participant facilitated visits to various post-16 destinations and organised careers fairs to help increase YP’s awareness about the different options available to them. This also included additional trips for YP with an identified ALN. These events were important and deemed successful for pupils however it was acknowledged that they did not happen as often as may be needed.</p>	<p><i>“we’ve used the school minibus and done visits to different agencies different training providers and specially I work with the ALNCO in school for those on the SEN register we take to different providers as well just so that college isn’t the only option it’s not just the multi skills there are other options out there for them” P9</i></p> <p><i>“we do have a careers fair yearly and local employers are quite good at coming into that but ideally it should be done termly not just yearly” P9</i></p>
<p><u>Having connections with colleges</u></p> <p>Two participants discussed the connections and relationships that have been built with the local colleges that the majority of pupils transitioned into post-16. These links were felt to facilitate more successful transitions as it helped to raise YP’s awareness of what different options colleges could provide them with.</p>	<p><i>“we’ve got really good links with the sort of colleges” P10</i></p> <p><i>“we’re leaning on other organisations like college to come in and sell the achievable dream that you don’t have to go back to Sixth Form and do A Levels for it to be successful and so we get those in at an earlier opportunity” P8</i></p>
<p><u>Is there enough choice post-16?</u></p> <p>One participant highlighted that apprenticeship and employment options for YP are not as easy to progress into as places in college. The</p>	<p><i>“I always feel that kids have to go out and find their apprenticeships a little bit more than kids have to find the right courses a little bit more</i></p>

<p>systems to choose these destinations are not as embedded as they should be and thus increased awareness and support for these could be beneficial.</p>	<p><i>independently than kids that have to find the right courses in college” P10</i></p> <p><i>“I’m a big fan of pupils going into employment going into sort of worthy employment training programmes banks like I said are really good at doing that but they kind of standalone a little bit” P10</i></p>
<p><u>Practical skills for adulthood</u></p> <p>Providing YP with practical skills they will need in adulthood was also incorporated in the school staff’s role. This included facilitating whole year assemblies to promote key messages to all pupils, such as the importance of having good references and qualifications. Some pupils would also receive additional support in small groups to support them with skills around managing their own money or creating a CV.</p>	<p><i>“when I’m doing assemblies to Year 10s at the start key stage four we kind of always think about what’s important...“you got you got to set yourself up with you know a good reputation with a good reference with a good set of qualifications good set of results”” P10</i></p> <p><i>“it’s discussing what they’re going to put on their CVs” P9</i></p> <p><i>“ the majority will get some sort of EMA or they’ll get their wages and it’s getting them to realise it’s not just their money to spend on whatever they want they need to start planning the financial side of things as well as something we work on” P9</i></p>
<p><u>Monitoring safe arrival at next destination</u></p> <p>School staff reflected that they did not feel their role stopped as soon as YP left school or sixth form, but that they continued to make sure that all pupils had transitioned successfully. If YP did not arrive at their post-16</p>	<p><i>“the next step is September we’ll meet again tick off the ones that have turned up at college then go looking for the ones that haven’t turned up” P9</i></p>

<p>destination or were having difficulties finding an appropriate post-18 destination, staff continued to support YP despite this no longer being their responsibility.</p>	<p><i>“there's a real sort of responsibility and ownership of those pupils by the head of sixth form and that team to make sure nobody relaxes until we know where those that those pupils have been able to progress on to an appropriate pathway and they can be sort of endless chasing and phoning and perhaps linking with Careers Wales or perhaps working with a university or or working with UCAS or whatever but we are prepared to keep getting our hands dirty sort of long after that results day where technically “Cheerio”” P10</i></p>
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4.5 Summary of Results

When comparing the data gathered across the three professional groups, there was much commonality of current practice supporting YP who are at risk of becoming NEET. A Venn diagram is depicted in Figure 18 to represent the full list of similarities and variations between the participants. Although each professional group had a unique and individual contribution to the NEETs agenda, there was also a considerable agreement about the importance of identifying YP who are at risk, working with multi-agencies, and ensuring that YP are heard and listened to. This was to ensure that early intervention is put in place to avoid YP becoming NEET, as all participants acknowledged the difficulties and barriers faced when this happens. All professional groups highlighted the importance of providing genuine care and building positive relationships with YP to increase the engagement in any intervention provided. A final commonality across participant groups was an emphasis placed on understanding why YP were beginning to disengage from EET in order to provide tailored and appropriate support.

There was also some overlap of sub-themes found between two of the professional groups, but not depicted in the third. This included the NEET Leads and school staff who identified using regular systems to monitor and track YP who are at risk of becoming NEET, working with YP to ensure they are on the right EET pathway as well as providing adequate post-16 transition support. A

commonality was also found between the NEET Leads and EWOs who discussed the usefulness of the role of the EP.

Each professional group was found to offer their own unique perceptions and contributions about the current support for YP at risk of becoming NEET. For the NEET Leads, this included their overarching position which enables them to support both pre- and post- 16 EET settings. Accountability to LAs and Welsh Government was also found to underpin their role to ensure the support they provide is effective. EWOs identified the importance of supporting YP and their families in the home environment which was not always possible by other professional groups. Finally, school staff identified that building links with post-16 destinations to support transitions and ensuring that YP develop skills necessary for adulthood is important within their role.

Further findings will be explored in more detail and individual research questions will be addressed in the following discussion section.

Figure 18

Venn diagram of the main themes produced by the three professional groups (see below)



5.0 Discussion

This research aimed to answer the following overarching research question; *What are the perceptions of NEET Leads, EWOs and Secondary School staff of how YP at risk of becoming NEET are supported in Wales?* By exploring three different professional groups, participants identified a wide range of positive support mechanisms that take place within Welsh LAs, as well as some current difficulties and barriers. The findings are discussed alongside the application of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory in acknowledgment that all systems around the YP need to be considered when developing effective practice (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1992).

The following discussion will address each of the three subsidiary research questions in turn and will conclude with implications for Welsh Government and policy developers.

5.1 RQ1. What is working to support YP who are at risk of becoming NEET?

Overall, each group of professionals placed great emphasis on implementing preventative strategies and early intervention to YP deemed at risk of becoming NEET. The role of the NEET lead takes a strategic and accountable position in each LA, whereas EWOs and school staff focused more on direct work with individual YP and their families.

5.1.1 Early identification tools

Early identification tools were used to identify the YP most at risk of becoming NEET in order to implement early intervention and support. As there are not unlimited resources within LAs, these systems aimed to provide a transparent rationale for targeting individual YP.

The most common method used was an early identification screener that focused on pre-determined risk factors, represented in the NEET lead *"Computer-based programmes"* and school staff *"Identifying YP at risk"* sub-themes. Professionals would use these tools to work out an accumulative risk level for YP, aiming to provide a measure of those most in need of support. There were some reported differences between LAs about which risk factors should hold more weight than others, however they commonly included factors such as, ALN, CLA, Free School Meals (FSM), previous school exclusions, etc. It was generally felt by most participants that these screeners were

successful in capturing those YP most at risk of becoming NEET. This finding backs up previous research conducted by Arnold and Baker (2012) who found that a screener could identify around 50% of YP who were at risk of becoming NEET up to 3 years prior to leaving school. Additionally, professionals found these screeners were easy to use and offered a convenient way for different agencies to contribute and update the system.

Interestingly, participants also identified the benefits of supplementing these screeners “*using practitioner knowledge*” of those working directly with the YP. This addition was argued to ensure the identification processes was thorough and accurate, capturing important information that could have been lost using the computer-based programmes alone. This echoes previous research which argued that screeners could fail to capture and appreciate the diversity of each individual YP’s life (Arnold & Baker, 2012; Currie & Goodall, 2009). The current paper suggests that professionals in Wales have already implemented additional collaborative systems to address this potential shortfall and ensure that any YP at risk of becoming NEET do not miss out on preventative support.

5.1.2 Multi-agency working

The importance of multi-agency working to implement support for YP at risk of becoming NEET was noted. School staff, EWOs and NEET leads all discussed the need for effective working relationships to support a better and more co-ordinated approach.

School staff and EWOs noted their reliance on external agencies, to ensure YP at the greatest risk receive the support they need, recognising they are “*part of a bigger team*”. Professionals would meet regularly to discuss and monitor pupils with the designated NEET Lead and when in agreement, additional LA support could be provided. This includes “*working with others*” to access careers services, youth workers, EPs and a wide variety of charity and voluntary services that differ according to individual LAs. It was also recognised that some “*ALN pupils bring different challenges*” and in some LAs, specialist careers services could also be accessed through these multi-agency meetings. Although these processes were not always perfect (see discussion of RQ2 for further exploration of these issues), this research demonstrates that multi-agency working helps to provide co-ordinated practice.

The introduction of the YEPF in Wales saw a non-statutory recommendation for an appointed position within LAs to oversee and co-ordinate NEET support (Welsh Government, 2013). All LAs

who took part in this research had implemented this advice and appointed a person to fulfil this role. The outcomes of this study suggest that this appears to be an important role within Welsh LAs, highlighted by the “*We are the bridge*” theme which explores their unique position embedded in both pre- and post-16 provisions. Without a designated person to understand what individual roles and responsibilities each service has; it could be argued that navigating all this support would be harder for school staff.

5.1.3 Supporting YP to have a good pre-16 learning experience.

The importance of ensuring YP have a positive school experience to reduce the risk of later becoming NEET has been previously acknowledged (Arnold & Baker, 2013; Billington, 2018). The outcomes from this study found that different strategies were used by professionals to help encourage and promote engagement in pre-16 education during this important “emerging adulthood” life stage (Arnett, Žukauskienė, & Sugimura, 2014; Baltes, Lindenberger, & Staudinger, 2007). These strategies will be discussed individually below.

5.1.3.1 Alternative curriculums and pathways.

School staff reported that “*getting the pathway right*” and implementing alternative provisions or curriculums was a transformative part of the support offered, explaining that some YP do not respond well to traditional educational routes in mainstream comprehensive schools. Alternatives included working towards different qualifications, mixed learning experiences or offsite alternative learning providers. When the right learning pathway was provided to a YP, it was felt this had a significant positive impact on both their wellbeing and engagement, as well as a better academic outcome than previously expected. It could be perceived that an appropriate educational provision fostered a greater sense of belonging to a group and facilitated more positive educational experiences (Allen & Kern, 2017). The impact that an appropriate learning environment can have on a YP’s confidence and self-esteem has also been previously noted (Arnold & Baker, 2013; Crichton & Hellier, 2009) and, that an alternative programme with more vocational courses considerably reduces risk of becoming NEET (Haughey, 2009). This finding supports the importance of the factors within a YP’s microsystem, including the influence a positive interaction with their learning environment could have on engagement (Bronfenbrenner, 1992).

5.1.3.2 Listening to YP

A theme that appeared to be embedded in day-to-day practice was *“listening to the YP’s voice”*. Opportunities were actively sought by all professionals to encourage YP to share their thoughts and feelings which were then used to inform pupil-centred practice. This included EWOs gathering the YP’s perspective on attending school when directly supporting families. School staff reported using a variety of methods, including through regular 1:1 meetings with staff, access to a learning mentor or through more casual conversations. NEET Leads discussed implementing youth work support that provided drop-ins to help acknowledge that *“wellbeing matters”* whilst providing a time and space for YP to talk. This information could then be used to tailor learning provision and support strategies accordingly, which participants felt significantly increased positive engagement and participation in learning. Craig (2009) and Crichton & Hellier (2009) also highlighted the importance of including YP’s views in supporting positive engagement in EET. The frequent inclusion of genuinely listening to YP have been found to increase acceptance and feelings that they belong and are valued within the school community (Allen & Kern, 2017). Therefore, it is promising that gathering the voices of the YP appears to be common practice for the professionals that took part in this research.

5.1.3.3 Supportive relationships

The importance of building positive relationships with school staff to support belief in themselves and promote engagement has been identified as a key factor of positive change in previous research (Borrett & Rowley, 2020; Currie & Goodall, 2009; Lawson & Parker, 2020). All groups of professionals in this study spoke with passion and enthusiasm about the support they provide for YP at risk of becoming NEET. This *“genuine care”* and compassion to do the very best for YP in their LAs was a strong message that emerged in all the interviews. Participants felt supportive relationships that they developed with pupils and their families, arguably promoted better engagement in EET. EWOs built connections by being *“on the shop floor”* with YP and their families and clients trusted and confided in them. School staff acknowledged some YP benefit from someone to believe in them and offered this encouragement to all that needed it. NEET Leads would ensure that members of their team never gave up by *“not letting YP drift”* away from education. YP who are at risk of becoming NEET often experience feeling isolated from EET communities and have reduced opportunities to have positive experiences with staff due to increased exclusions and time away from education, and this has been argued to increase the likelihood of later becoming NEET (Parker et al., 2021). The positive impact that was reported by participants, reaffirms the protective nature

that supportive relationships within a YP's microsystem can have (Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Manning, 2018; Schoon, 2014).

5.1.4 Post-16 transition support

Established post-16 transition support was in place across LAs and each professional group had a role contributing to this. Four components of current post-16 transition practice were considered as making a positive difference.

5.1.4.1 NEET Lead

The role of the NEET lead is a key factor in facilitating transition between educational settings as represented in the theme *"we are the bridge"*. Their central role within the LA offers them a unique position to oversee transitions between the pre and post 16 provisions. Arnold and Baker (2012) highlighted the importance of providing stability and continuity to YP across transition in order to ensure this process is successful. This research suggests that NEET Leads offer a unique contribution towards achieving that by being embedded within all settings and having a systemic view of the whole picture. Government and LA policy make up part of the wider influences in a YP's macrosystem, and if these are successful then it can have a positive influence on many YP (Hodgson & Spours, 2015). The current research could be argued to provide positive evidence to suggest these roles should continue.

5.1.4.2 Supporting YP to have the right post-16 destination

Another key component included a focus from NEET leads and school staff to make sure that all YP have an appropriate destination to transition into. School staff supported YP by having regular conversations to increase their *"awareness of post-16 options"*, helping them to make the best and most appropriate choices for them. Pupils who do not have a destination are picked up for additional support and guidance which can be provided by school staff, Careers Wales or youth workers. Even for YP who had enrolled at a post-16 destination, staff identified the importance of *"getting the pathway right"* and would identify those who they felt had made an inappropriate choice and were therefore at risk of dropping out after transition. NEET leads took a lead in *"managing the post-16 transition"* and maintained an overarching view of the data and monitored each Year 11 cohort.

Supporting YP to make the right choice also included facilitating visits to post-16 provisions and one school reported organising careers fairs, which increased a YP's awareness of their EET options. When applied to a YP's mesosystem, providing YP with positive experience across different settings supports the application of these skills into new places (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), and previous research has also reported that YP often feel more prepared for their transition if pre-visits take place (Craig, 2009; Manning, 2018). Both NEET Leads and school staff reported that these strategies helped to significantly increase a YP's enthusiasm and excitement to attend, informing a tentative conclusion that these events could reduce the risk of YP dropping out.

Findings from this research contradict previous studies that concluded that often some YP were not aware of all the post-16 options available to them (Gabriel, 2015; Manning, 2018). Although this research did not gather the views of the YP themselves, results suggest that in Wales there are regular opportunities and mechanisms in place to raise awareness of the variety of post-16 destinations.

5.1.4.3 Schools linking with colleges

Both school staff and NEET Leads discussed close relationships and links that have been built between schools and post-16 destinations. This has been argued to be an important feature of promoting successful transitions (Currie & Goodall, 2009; Morris & Atkinson, 2018). The strongest relationship often appeared to be "*having connections with colleges*" where most YP would generally transition into. Participants identified that college staff would make regular visits to schools to meet with YP, preparing them for what college would be like and what courses are available. School staff reported that YP responded well to this and it helped them to make more informed decisions.

5.1.4.4 Skills for Adulthood

Opportunities for YP at risk of becoming NEET were provided with additional support to learn "*practical skills for adulthood*". School staff facilitated sessions on CV writing, money managing skills or opening a bank account. Lawson and Parker (2020) identified the important role that adults can play in encouraging YP to be independent and help to prepare them for adulthood. It appeared that participants provided opportunities to embed skills and knowledge to the wider year group

population, as well as implementing targeted support to those who were identified would benefit most.

5.1.5 What is working to support YP who *are* NEET?

The practice as discussed in RQ1 ultimately aims to prevent the numbers of YP who become NEET and participants acknowledged that rates are relatively low at this time. However, despite these preventative strategies, a proportion of YP still become NEET upon leaving school. In this study, support primarily came from the role of the NEET Lead who continues to monitor YP and support re-engagement into EET, as the roles and responsibilities of EWOs and school staff cease after a YP leaves school.

It is however important to note that the above discussion of practice also has application for YP who become NEET, including the importance of developing positive relationships, listening to YP and the role of the NEET lead to facilitate support.

5.1.5.1 Tracking and Monitoring

There are current systems in place to pick up YP who do not arrive at their intended destination as part of the NEET leads role in *"managing the post-16 transition"*. School staff discussed that they would liaise with the NEET Leads to monitor where YP have gone after they leave school. However, it was the NEET Leads responsibility to co-ordinate support, find these YP and speak to them about why they have not returned to EET. Advice and support would often be implemented by the youth service who work with YP to address any current barriers to attending and help them re-engage. The importance of ensuring YP arrive at their intended destination has been acknowledged in previous research, and NEET leads discuss the prominence of this within their role (Arnold & Baker, 2012). These processes allow YP to be picked up as soon as possible, to minimize the time they are out of EET, as previous research suggests that the longer a YP is disengaged the harder it will be to re-engage (Mawn et al., 2017).

Often when working to re-engage YP, numerous barriers to accessing EET were reported. Participants identified that this could include equipment they might need or a driving license to get to a setting. NEET Leads discussed how many of these factors could be provided for YP which improved their ability to access the provision they wanted. Participants appeared to be flexible and

would adapt their approach according to the individual needs and barriers they were facing to re-engage.

5.1.5.2 Multi-agency support

As previously discussed in RQ1, the need for different agencies to work together effectively is important within the NEET agenda. For YP who have become NEET, this continues to be the case and NEET leads are required to liaise with post-16 providers and other outside agencies to support a YP to find a form of EET that they would engage with.

5.2 RQ2. How could support be improved for YP who are at risk of becoming NEET?

5.2.1 Budget and time restrictions

Both NEET leads and school staff identified that *“current funding arrangements don’t make it easy”* and place restrictions on their ability to provide support to YP who are or at risk of becoming NEET.

School staff express that current funding is significantly stretched, arguing that although they can often offer highly individualised approaches to those YP most at risk, *“we can’t do this for everyone”*. Planning and budget control is needed within schools to ensure that finances can be carefully managed. This also impacts on levels of staffing and increased workloads, with staff even reporting limited time for lunch breaks. Current literature acknowledges the often crucial role that secondary schools play in the prevention of YP becoming NEET (Robertson, 2018), however, the participants in this study suggest that current budgets do not reflect the investment required. Given the long-term costs of YP becoming NEET, it could be argued that additional spending for those at risk would benefit long-term Government spending (Audit Commission, 2010).

NEET Leads also discussed the financial constraints they face as current LA budgets are grant funded, which are tied to targets that need to be strictly adhered to. This means that funding is provided on a temporary basis, limiting the ability for professionals to make long-term plans and provide a continuous service for YP. Grant funding also requires additional time for professionals to evidence and document how the money is being spent and whether it is having an appropriate impact. This strict outcome monitoring has been argued to limit access to support for the most disadvantaged, because professionals are not able to justify spending on a YP who will be difficult to re-engage and

would therefore show little improvement (Arnold & Baker, 2013). Although participants acknowledged that they do their best to provide support for YP, concern was raised about how it restricts flexibility and creativity to use funds in a way that suits their localised area. P2 described it as “*a giant chess board*” which requires careful moving of pieces to try and make it fit to their LA. Within a YP’s Macrosystem, the organisation and delivery of support services, including inconsistent staffing and underfunding, will have an impact on a YP’s access to the support they need (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1992; Lorine, Ryan, D’Angelo, & Kaye, 2019; Reid, 2007). It is important for policy developers and governments to acknowledge the impact that this could be having on YP’s engagement with EET.

5.2.2 Multi-agency support

The difficulties of working with a wide and diverse range of professionals and agencies to support YP at risk of becoming NEET was also highlighted within this research. As reflected in sub-theme “*Ensuring joined up multi-agency working*”, NEET leads reported that co-ordinating everyone’s individual roles was often complex and there can be confusion about the delegation of responsibility. The challenge of being able to manage this range of professionals has been previously identified due to uncertainty about roles and responsibilities (Bason, 2020; Currie & Goodall, 2009; Morris & Atkinson, 2018).

A lack of co-ordination and poor information sharing between multi-agency services has been reported to impact on the appropriate timing of provision and support for YP (Craig, 2009; Mallinson, 2009). This finding was also reflected within this sub-theme as NEET leads discussed difficulties they had with information sharing procedures between EET provisions and services. Participants acknowledged that this could impact on effective multi-agency working when supporting YP. When considering Bronfenbrenner and the Macrosystem, a lack of a co-ordinated response could significantly be impacting on a YP’s accessibility to appropriate support, limiting the effectiveness of preventative strategies (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1992; Lorine et al., 2019).

5.2.3 Some YP and families are difficult to engage

All groups of professionals discussed and highlighted that some YP and families are difficult to engage and that sometimes there is very little they can do or offer. This included for YP in both pre- and post-16 settings who were not currently attending. EWOs reflected on the support they offer to

families and reported that despite their best efforts, *“some won’t engage”* limiting their options of what to do next. School staff are also restricted with what to offer as preventative support often requires YP to be physically attending an educational provision in order to access it, therefore leading to *“we can’t help you if you’re not in school”*. NEET Leads also identified that *“NEET YP are more challenging to help”* with participants identifying that sometimes there is very little that works to support a YP to re-engage.

5.2.4 Post-16 transitions

5.2.4.1 Lack of diverse choices

It was identified by school staff that the routes into apprenticeships or employment were not as developed and clear cut as more educational mainstream options. This was found to lead to the majority of YP choosing to transition into sixth form or college with one participant questioning *“Is there enough diverse choice post-16?”*. Previous research also identified that routes into employment or training were often more fragmented than traditional routes into educational settings (Borrett & Rowley, 2020; Currie & Goodall, 2009; Gabriel, 2015). This study highlights that more established systems and processes for all EET options would be helpful to increase YP’s awareness of the breadth of options available to them.

5.2.4.2 Lack of opportunities for some

It is important to note that Wales has a mixed geography, containing both rural and urban areas, which led some participants to question *“Is there enough post-16 opportunities everywhere?”*. NEET Leads discussed that for some LAs in Wales, having poor transport links and long journey times create significant barriers to some YP’s engagement with EET. Different geographical areas have been identified as containing different risk factors for YP becoming NEET, and a low availability of employment opportunities and transport difficulties could be included within this for YP from more rural areas (Arnold & Baker, 2012; Hayton, 2009).

This study has helped to highlight and back up previous research that suggests that diverse and available EET opportunities may also be more limited for YP with ALN (Bason, 2020; Morris & Atkinson, 2018). This is reflected in the sub-theme *“ALN pupils bring different challenges”*, as school staff reflect that they have less options for alternative pathways/curriculums for those with ALN pre-

16. It was also discussed that this lack of options for ALN pupils was also found for those post-16 when choosing appropriate next steps.

5.2.4.3 Increasing awareness of options

As discussed in RQ1, pre-visits and careers fairs were reported to be successful in supporting a YP's "*awareness of post-16 options*" which appear to increase a YP's engagement and interest in further EET, however, this was not a consistent finding across all participants. Several professionals across the school staff and NEET lead groups did not mention this strategy as part of their post-16 transition support, and one participant who did, also identified that these events do not always happen as often as would be liked. It therefore appears that this may not be a strategy that is consistently implemented across all LAs and schools, echoing previous studies investigating post-16 transition support (Craig, 2009; Mallinson, 2009).

In summary, this combination of findings, argued to reside in the exosystem, could be contributing to the likelihood of some YP becoming NEET (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1992; Hodgson & Spours, 2015; Siraj et al., 2014). It is important to remain aware of the complexity of navigating the post-16 transition, to ensure that YP are aware of all the options available to them, whilst prompting government and policy developers to ensure there are diverse choices for all YP.

5.2.5 The impact of a pandemic

A final consideration for RQ2 is the common concern highlighted by the NEET leads about the potential long-term impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Participants acknowledged that the "*challenges of a pandemic*" will potentially increase the numbers of YP who are NEET, attributing this to a combination of YP spending a substantial amount of time away from EET and current and future access to support. Local job markets are commonly argued to negatively impact on YP if there are reduced opportunities across the population, which provides an important consideration about what the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic may have on YP who are at risk of becoming NEET further down the line (Maguire, 2020; Schoon, 2014).

5.3 RQ3. How could EPs be further involved in supporting YP who are at risk of becoming NEET?

In this research, three NEET leads and both EWOs identified that *“an EP could help”* to support YP who are at risk of becoming NEET. In these LAs, EPs were often used to contribute a deeper understanding of YP and their individual needs to develop tailored and bespoke support packages. Participants highlighted that this helped to provide correct early intervention which minimised later disengagement from EET.

However, current EP contributions were reported to be spontaneous rather than through organised referral systems due to current time and capacity limitations of EP services. The professionals in this study identified that if they needed EP support, they were often unable to refer YP directly themselves. One EWO highlighted this as a particular barrier in current practice and questioned whether school referrals were being used appropriately to prioritise the right YP. For YP with significant barriers to attending EET, youth workers are often the professional asked to directly provide 1:1 support with re-engagement. However, a NEET lead participant noted that the challenges can often be complex, and without EP support to help aid understanding and provide appropriate strategies, for example through supervision, it can be very difficult.

In summary, there was little information from the dataset that directly discussed EPs and their current or planned involvement with YP who are at risk of becoming NEET. However, there was a lot of indirect information that has relevance and application to the potential role of an EP.

EPs currently work in a range of situations and settings where there are concerns about children and young people’s (CYP) engagement and application to education and learning (Welsh Government, 2016). The profession strives to promote inclusive approaches in learning, teaching, parenting and nurturing CYP to support their development within their educational setting (Welsh Government, 2016). This involves using a range of psychological approaches with individuals, groups, schools and wider systems such as LAs and the community, working in partnership with parents, carers, families and others to ensure that a holistic approach is taken (Welsh Government, 2016). EPs are skilled and knowledgeable in the application of psychological theory to help develop an in-depth understanding of YP’s needs and appropriate intervention (Welsh Government, 2016). EP support aims to be pupil-centred by using active listening skills and psychological assessments to promote the voice of the YP (Billington, 2018). Furthermore, EPs currently support a range of vulnerable learners, for example, YP who are care experienced or from the traveller community. However, for

the population of YP who are at risk of becoming NEET and may experience long-term challenges, it is important to note that providing psychological support is not provided as part of the core service.

With this in mind and combined with the findings of the systematic literature review presented in Part A, the current skills and knowledge of EPs are highly transferable and applicable to supporting YP who are at risk of becoming NEET (Atkinson et al., 2015). The large majority of EPs in Wales are employed within LAs, providing an ideal position in which to contribute and support the breadth of current practice highlighted by professionals in this study (Welsh Government, 2016). See Figure 19 below for the implications for EPs to become further involved supporting YP who are or risk of becoming NEET.

Figure 19

Implications for EPs (see below)

Individual

- To contribute psychological knowledge and understanding of ALN, vulnerable groups and YP not attending EET.
- Provide individual support to YP that EWOS or NEET Leads prioritise, acknowledging these may not be the same as school priorities.
- Work with individual YP and their families to understand needs and develop tailored and bespoke support to increase engagement in EET and across post-16 transition.
- Use psychological and person-centred techniques to elicit the views of YP and increase active participation in their EET.

EET Settings

- Raise awareness of the preventative and responsive role EET provisions have, including delivering training or supervision on what settings can do to support YP at risk of becoming NEET. For example, the importance of building resilience and wellbeing, nurturing positive and supportive relationships, listening to YP's views and fostering feelings of belonging.
- Enable and support schools to develop adequate post-16 transition policies which include; raising YP's awareness of their post-16 options to support them to make appropriate choices suited to their needs and interests, facilitating pre-visits and developing YP's skills for adulthood.

Other agencies

- Contribute psychological support and supervision for youth workers and other professionals who provide direct support to YP.

Systemic

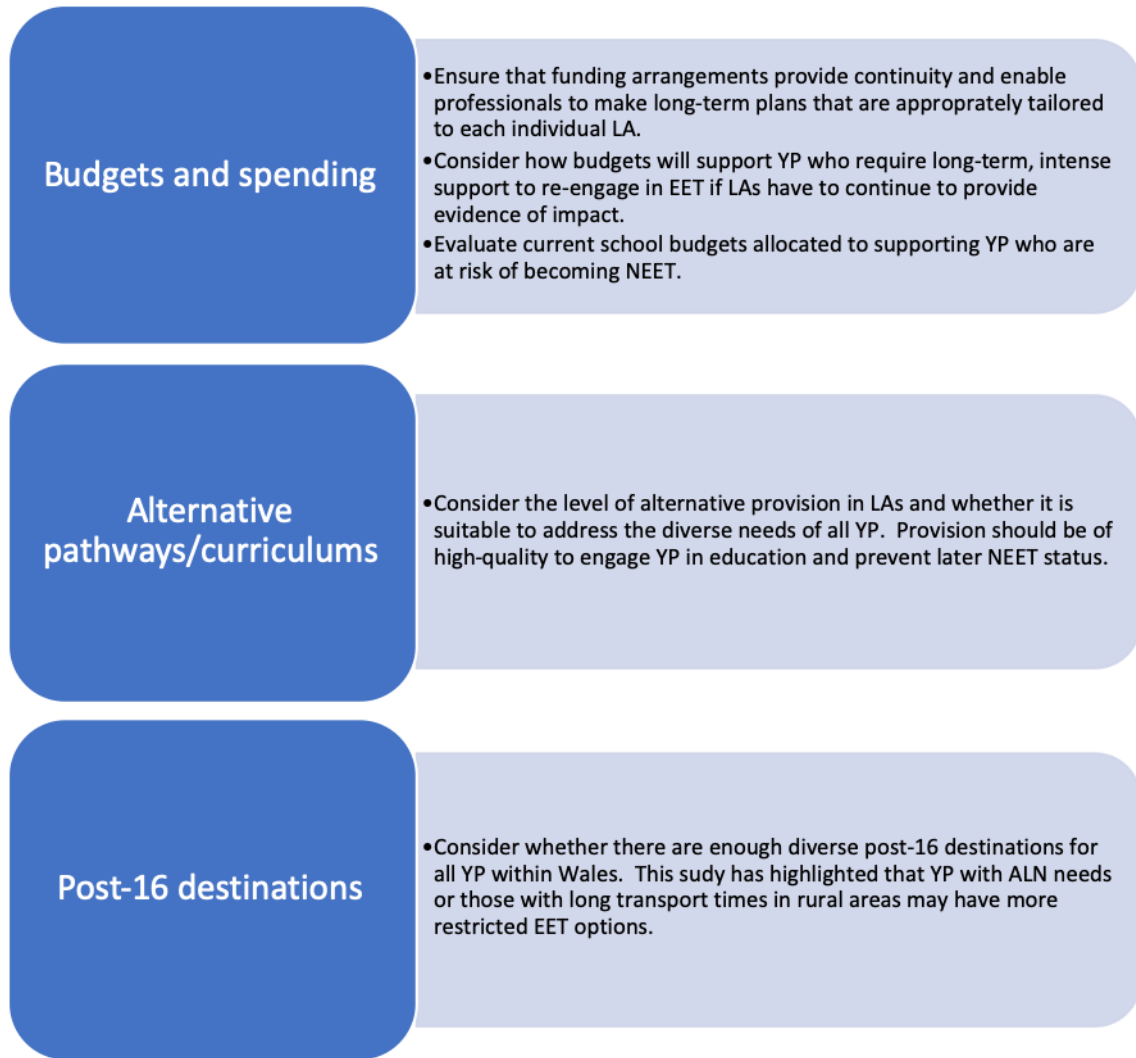
- Develop links and relationships with post-16 services in order to contribute, facilitate and co-ordinate multi-agency working.
- Contribute to post-16 transition policies to ensure that YP at risk of becoming NEET have adequate support and intervention.
- Consider current budgets and time capacity of EPs to contribute to the NEET agenda.
- Develop policies to support re-engagement of YP who have become NEET.
- Due to EP's position supporting a wide range of diverse YP, ensure that EPs contribute to the early identification systems of YP who are at risk of becoming NEET.

5.4 Implications for Welsh Government and policy developers

This research has identified positive features about current Government policy in Wales that oversees support for YP who are at risk of becoming NEET, including the use of early identification systems, the development of the NEET lead role and positive reports of current multi-agency working. It also suggests some implications for policy developers that could enhance the support currently available (see Figure 20). Themes recognised within this study have shed light on the potential impact that influences in a YP's Macrosystem can have on the future likelihood of later NEET status and the importance to consider them when developing effective practice in Wales (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1992; Lorine et al., 2019).

Figure 20

Implications for Welsh Government and policy developers



5.5 Future Research

Further research would be helpful to explore the views of YP who are at risk of becoming NEET and their thoughts of the support provided by professionals and services in Wales. This could include using an IPA methodology to explore in-depth their lived experiences and how they make sense of their EET journey.

Surveys, questionnaires or focus groups could be used to reach a wider range of professionals to gather their views about current practice in Wales. This could include further school staff, EWOs and NEET leads across more LAs, as well as including other key professionals who support YP who are at risk of becoming NEET, for example, youth workers and careers advisors. This would help to uncover whether the key messages found in this research are reflective of a wider participant selection.

Case studies could be carried out in individual LAs to explore how different multi-agencies currently work together. Due to the many providers and charity sectors within the realm of NEETs, this research would help to identify effective practices within local areas. New methodological techniques could be used, for example, multi-agency solution circles, to gather information whilst problem-solving ways forward in the individual context of the research.

5.6 Strengths and Limitations

See Table 26 below for a summary of strengths and limitations of the research.

Table 26

Strengths and limitations of the current study

Strengths	Limitations
<p>Methodology – The use of a qualitative design was beneficial to explore the in-depth views and experiences of professionals who participated.</p>	<p>Methodology - The use of a qualitative design reduces the generalisability of these findings to Wales, as it was a partial and subjective view of the professionals who took part. Participants were all recruited from LAs in South Wales and therefore inferences would be difficult to apply across Wales.</p>
<p>Participants – A range of different professional groups were gathered to explore perspectives across a relatively new and developing area of work for EPs. This helped to provide a range of perspectives about the current landscape of support.</p>	<p>Participants – Due to recruitment difficulties, there were uneven sample sizes across the sub-groups which meant that only one LA had a representative of each professional group included within the analysis.</p>
<p>Findings – This research offers a unique insight into a previously unexplored area of work for EPs in Wales. Encouraging outcomes were found about the current practice supporting YP who are at risk of becoming NEET, whilst also highlighting some key barriers and difficulties.</p>	<p>Findings – One important finding from the research was the importance of listening to and responding to the voices of YP. This research did not include the views of YP which could have been valuable to elicit what support they had found helpful within the context of Wales.</p>

5.7 Conclusion

The current study sought to explore how YP who are at risk of becoming NEET are supported by different professionals in Wales, and how could practice be enhanced, with a particular focus on the potential implications for the developing role of EPs. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with NEET leads, EWOs and secondary school staff across four LAs. Participants discussed their individual role and contribution when implementing support, highlighting components that are working well alongside any current barriers. In summary, participants identified a wide range of positive support mechanisms that are currently in place within Welsh LAs that focus on preventing YP from becoming NEET. Key elements included the use of tracking and monitoring tools, multi-agency working, ensuring YP have a good pre-16 learning experience and supporting across the post-16 transition. However, professionals also highlighted that budget and capacity restrictions, practical multi-agency working difficulties, and barriers to offering a diverse range of post-16 options are areas where practice could be improved. Results helped to highlight the importance of considering contributory systemic factors to a YP becoming NEET when developing policies and support packages, with particular relevance to Welsh Government and policy developers. Important implications for EPs were drawn across all levels of current practice, including supporting individuals, settings and the wider LA systems. Further exploration of the research process and dissemination of outcomes will take place in Part C.

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An Exploration of Multi-Professional Practice Working with Young People who are At Risk of Becoming Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) in Wales: Implications for the EP profession.

Part C: Critical Appraisal

Word Count: 7000

1.0 Overview

This critical appraisal aims to provide a reflective and reflexive account of my research process. It is an important element of qualitative research in acknowledging the way in which I, myself as the researcher, have been implicated in the research and findings (Willig, 2013). For this to be done effectively, I will adopt the use of the first person, to maintain my own critical position. This approach is supported by Pellegrini (2009, p. 272), who stated: “a direct consequence of self-reflexivity is the use of the first person to discuss the author’s ‘embedded’ role in the case study, not as an ‘objective’ outsider but as a practitioner affecting, and being affected by, the system”.

This appraisal will include two distinct sections: a critical account of myself as a researcher followed by my contribution to current knowledge. The first section will consist of reflections on my research choices, including theoretical perspective, methodology and analysis. The second section will include the origin of my research project, the contribution of the findings to the knowledge base and the relevance to EP practice.

2.0 Critical account of the research practitioner

2.1 Conducting the literature review

Conducting a thorough literature search felt daunting and overwhelming at first. I sought advice from the Cardiff University library service, and through these sessions I was able to build up my skills to explore multiple databases and establish a clear rationale for conducting both a narrative and systematic literature review. A systematic review answers a narrowly focused question with a key contribution of summarising the current data (Green, Johnson, & Adams, 2006). A narrative review is down to individual interpretation and critique aiming to deepen understanding (Green et al., 2006). Below I will explain my rationale for the importance of both within my literature review.

2.1.1 Rationale for conducting a narrative review

Due to the historical and political development surrounding young people (YP) who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), as well as literature from a variety of backgrounds including social work, youth services and career services, it felt necessary to synthesise and incorporate this wide scope into my thesis (Green et al., 2006). A narrative review “relates a study

to the larger, ongoing dialogue in the literature, filling in gaps and extending prior studies” (Creswell, 2009, p. 26). I therefore aimed to provide a comprehensive coverage of the topic area and set the scene for my research project, information which might otherwise have been lost (Collins & Fauser, 2005; Siddaway, Wood, & Hedges, 2019). The process of consolidating the available literature from such a wide selection of sources was not easy and a common limitation of a narrative review is the difficulty in removing researcher bias when choosing the literature to be included (Collins & Fauser, 2005; Siddaway et al., 2019). In an attempt to overcome this, I gathered the included literature using systematic techniques (see Appendix N for search terms and databases used) and additional literature was identified through a snowballing technique whilst I was becoming immersed in the literature I had found (Patton, 2015). I feel that a balanced and overarching review was achieved which I hope will help potential readers to appreciate the historical, political and contextual background to the NEET agenda and where my empirical study fits within that.

2.1.2 Rationale for conducting a systematic review

During my initial searches, I found only limited literature that encompassed both the role of the EP and YP who are at risk of becoming NEET. With this in mind, it felt important to directly explore the scope of current EP focused research and what it has found to be important for YP who are at risk of becoming NEET. “A systematic review is a novel and important substantive contribution to knowledge in its own right” and I felt that conducting one would support my confidence in addressing the potential implications for EP practice (Siddaway et al., 2019, p. 752). Another strength of a systematic literature review is the removal of my own bias by using explicit and transparent rationale to answer my specific research question (Collins & Fauser, 2005; Siddaway et al., 2019; Van Wee & Banister, 2016).

Initially I intended to conduct a systematic review of EP focused research papers that explicitly mentioned the concept of NEET in the title or abstract. However, preliminary searches uncovered only six studies, which was felt would offer quite limited and narrow conclusions (Siddaway et al., 2019). Therefore, the decision was made to broaden my inclusion criteria to include research that also focused on the 16-25 sector, post-16 transition or re-engagement into education, employment or training (EET) as the results would still be relevant when considering the EP role in supporting YP who are NEET.

To do this I formulated a list of appropriate search terms (see Appendix A) which I used across multiple relevant databases, as well as supplementing these findings with individual searches of relevant EP related journals (e.g. Educational Psychology in Practice) and unpublished doctoral theses (Green et al., 2006). It was difficult to feel sure that all the current literature had been gathered, however I am confident that my processes and search terms were rigorous. I used the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) model to provide clarity and transparency of each step of my search and rationale for the final included literature (Moher et al., 2009;2015) (see Figure 5).

Once I had carried out my literature search, it was important to critically evaluate the 15 included studies for appropriateness and quality. Different methods of conducting this were considered, including Gough (2007)'s Weight of Evidence framework. However, the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklists were chosen, similar to the methodology adopted by Yang, Salamonsen, Burns and Schmied (2018), due to the flexibility and applicability to provide my own critique of each study. Two of the checklists (qualitative and systematic) were referred to whilst reading and immersing myself in the research and the sample sizes, methodology and any key limitations were noted in Table 11 (CASP, 2018). On reflection, this process provided a clear, transparent overview of each included study.

2.2 Ontology and Epistemology

Ontology is a term derived from the Greek word onto, meaning 'the study of that which is'. It describes the philosophical study of the nature of the world and concern over that which exists independent to the reality that humans place upon it (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Willig, 2013). Willig (2013, p. 12) suggests that the driving question of ontology is "what is there to know?" There is a continuum of views, ranging from 'realism' which argues there is a true reality independent of human experience to 'relativism' which argues that reality is entirely dependent on human interpretation and knowledge (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

This research has adopted a critical realist ontological position which acknowledges that "a pre-social reality exists but we can only ever partially know it" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 26). This paradigm has been argued to sit in the middle of the ontological continuum and accepts that whilst there is an underlying truth, factors such as language and culture will continue to shape this (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Willig, 2013). This paradigm also accepts that this truth can only be partially

accessed through exploring individual's interpretations, i.e., how participants perceive the implementation of support to YP who are at risk of becoming NEET. Fletcher describes adopting a critical realist ontology as "the search for causation helps researchers to explain social events and suggest practical policy recommendations to address social problems" (Fletcher, 2017, p. 181). This resonated with my adoption of this paradigm by acknowledging that there are real truths that underpin the concept of being NEET, whilst remaining based in the social and cultural realities of the world in which we live.

Consideration was given to adopting the position of relativism which accepts that "what is 'real' and 'true' differs across time and context" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 27). As much as this view feels important, I also acknowledge that there are certain 'truths' in the world, such as significant social exclusion and negative long-term consequence for YP who are NEET which have been reported through statistics and research for many years (Brynner & Parsons, 2002; Social Exclusion Unit, 1999).

Epistemology is derived from the Greek word 'episteme' and means 'the theory of knowledge'. Epistemology is concerned with "a world where all sorts of knowledge exist, how do we know what to trust, which are meaningful?" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 28). This involves thinking about the reliability and validity of the knowledge that we claim to know. A positivist position would accept that through appropriate scientific methods, the truth could be uncovered (Braun & Clarke, 2013). On the other end of the continuum, a constructionist epistemology argues there is no way to know knowledge because it is forever linked with the social world (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

The epistemological standpoint taken in this research was Contextualism which sits somewhere between those two poles (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This theoretical approach accepts that there is not one "single reality" to find but that knowledge emerges from different local and situated contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 31). This epistemology acknowledges that whilst "no single method can get to the truth" it accepts that "knowledge will be true (valid) in certain contexts" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 31). To explore these contextual truths, participants were gathered from four different LAs in Wales, to ensure that these localised viewpoints were included in the analysis of support for YP who are at risk of becoming NEET.

A social constructionist epistemology was considered due its acceptance that knowledge is only derived from individual participant's reflections of reality and how they personally construct and

interpret their experiences. Frost (2011, p. 147) defines social constructionism as an approach where “unique realities are created by individuals through their interactions with others.” However, I felt that there would be some truth in my participants’ experiences. I wanted to understand what support currently looked like for YP who are at risk of becoming NEET in Wales, however I did acknowledge that these ‘truths’ would differ across different geographical areas.

2.3 Research design and development of methodology

Thus, I chose a qualitative design which helps to give a voice to participants by providing opportunities to explore their experiences and how they make sense of the world (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Willig, 2013). I adopted the methodology of semi-structured interviews to explore different multi-professional views on their current practice supporting YP who are at risk of becoming NEET. This technique provided me with opportunities to explore individual perspectives in-depth (McIntosh & Morse, 2015; Willig, 2013). I developed three semi-structured interview schedules for each group of professionals that took part: NEET Leads (Appendix C), EWOs (Appendix D) and school staff (Appendix E). I referred to a semi-structured interview framework throughout this process to ensure that I remained reflective and mindful of the appropriateness of my questions (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016). A criticism of using semi-structured interviews is how much influence researchers can have in the back-and-forth conversation with each participant, so it was important to remain aware of this (Kallio et al., 2016; Willig, 2013). I aimed to produce interview schedules that could be used flexibly to ensure that interviewees could discuss their individual experiences with limited interference and structure from myself (Kallio et al., 2016; Willig, 2013). This included ensuring that I did not attempt to steer the conversation, through paraphrasing or redirecting, to topics which answered my own research questions, for example, asking about the positives of using EPs (Kallio et al., 2016; Willig, 2013).

I personally found it difficult to develop three sets of interview schedules whilst ensuring that I was gathering the information I wanted. A crucial step in this process was conducting a pilot interview for each professional group to ensure the flow and clarity of my questions was satisfactory (Kallio et al., 2016). Minor adjustments were made to some questions which were originally separated to distinguish between YP who were at risk of becoming NEET and those YP were already NEET. When used in a real interview scenario, this caused repetition to the answers given. These questions were adjusted for future interviews; however, the changes were not felt to affect the quality of the data and therefore the pilot interviews were still included in the analysis.

Due to the Covid-19 global pandemic, government restrictions prevented face-to-face interviews taking place. Therefore, an amendment to my research was submitted to the Cardiff University Ethics Committee to include the use of virtual interviews. This has been previously viewed as a mediocre alternative to face-to-face interviews due to the increased barriers in building rapport with participants and more limited opportunities to observe non-verbal communication (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Willig, 2013). However recent research has acknowledged that virtual interviews are a cost-effective and convenient substitute for face-to-face interviews (Archibald et al., 2019; Gray et al., 2020). This is argued to be due to increased accessibility and ease of scheduling for participants and comfort of discussing certain topics within a familiar environment for them (Gray et al., Hanna & Mwale, 2017; 2020; Willig, 2013). A reduction in potential ethical issues when transporting confidential data before anonymisation has also been acknowledged (Archibald et al., 2019).

My personal experience and reflections of conducting virtual interviews replicated these later findings and I would argue it was an adequate alternative. At times, there were technical difficulties due to poor internet connection and some disruptions due to being at home, for example, doorbells or lawn mowers, which may have affected a participant's train of thought and sometimes made transcription more difficult (Hanna & Mwale, 2017). One participant also acknowledged the newness of using virtual platforms and reported being nervous about it, especially as it was being recorded for transcription purposes. On reflection, this participant may not have felt this way if the interview had taken place face-to-face and it was important to reaffirm that recordings were only to carry out a full analysis and would be deleted within two weeks after an anonymous transcription had been written (Willig, 2013). However, because of the continued use of online working for many professionals during the Covid-19 pandemic, the limitations of using video calling software were felt to be minimal on building rapport or affecting the data collected for all other participants.

Reflecting on all the individual interviews, whilst acknowledging that perhaps they were not always perfect, I have developed skills as a researcher and learnt from these experiences. This includes overcoming nerves and feeling more confident to use the prompt questions when conducting an interview with less talkative participants. Most importantly, I have learnt the value of silent pauses in interviews to allow participants space to think and expand their answers (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

I did consider using a focus group methodology with multi-professional groups. Rabiee (2004, p. 656) argues "the type and range of data generated through the social interaction of the group are often deeper and richer than those obtained from one-to-one interviews". Focus groups could have

allowed challenge, extension and development of ideas between the participants which has been argued to provide rich data (Willig, 2013). However, there are several disadvantages to the focus group method which affect the validity of the data such as members dominating discussions as not all participants will be equally articulate (Creswell, 2009; Willig, 2013). Kidd and Parshall (2000, p. 294) argue that “individuals in groups do not speak or answer questions in the same way as they do in other settings”. My reflections after completing this research consider that although focus groups could have been useful, individual interviews provided a strength by exploring each professional’s individual role and contribution to supporting the NEET agenda across LAs.

2.3.1 Research questions

My research initially included one overarching research question and eight subsidiary questions, which aimed to provide clarity when distinguishing between YP who are at risk of becoming NEET, YP who are NEET, those with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) and post-16 transition. My initial overarching question was phrased as “what is the role for the EP in supporting YP who are or at risk of becoming NEET?”. However, during the data collection stage, I found myself doubting I would be able to answer this as my first two participants acknowledged that EPs did not currently play a part and that they could not envision how they could fit in current LA systems. Another later change included a reflection about whether I was collecting adequate data to sufficiently explore support for YP who are NEET, as two of my participant groups only supported those at risk. Willig (2013) acknowledges that qualitative research questions are provisional and could change if they are found not to be relevant to the participant’s experiences. “Qualitative research is open to the possibility that the research question may have to change during the research process” (Willig, 2013, p. 27). This led me to reflect upon and develop my overarching question during supervision sessions and was finalised as “What are the perceptions of NEET Leads, EWOs and Secondary School staff of how YP at risk of becoming NEET are supported in Wales?” I felt this was an important alteration to my research, focusing on its strength of exploring of multi-professional practice, and drawing implications for EPs from this.

2.4 Participants

The application of Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory within this thesis has helped to highlight the complexities of each YP’s life and how wider contextual factors will interplay with a YP’s engagement with EET and transition to adulthood (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Hodgson & Spours, 2015;

Lorine et al., 2019; Schoon, 2014). This includes considering what intervention is being offered, and what impact such a large array of professionals and services are having on the YP they aim to support (Lorine et al., 2019). With these thoughts in mind, it was important to consider carefully which professionals should be included in this research to provide a breadth of understanding about current practice. The chosen participant groups were: NEET Leads within LAs, Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) and secondary school staff and individual reasons for these choices are displayed in Table 12.

The inclusion of NEET Leads in my research came when a Youth Engagement Progression Framework Co-ordinator (YEPFC) sparked my initial interest in this topic area (Welsh Government, 2013). However, I soon came to realise that different LAs had a variety of different titles and positions that also supported the NEET agenda. Therefore, it was necessary for my inclusion criteria to cover any role that had responsibility to co-ordinate and oversee current support in each LA. Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) were a second LA representative included due to their role in supporting YP who are risk of becoming NEET due to current attendance difficulties in school.

When conducting some of my initial literature searches, a recent thesis project discussed the importance of understanding how schools' view support for YP's engagement and transition to post-16 provisions and acknowledged an oversight by not including school staff's views (Gabriel, 2015). Secondary schools are often a major positive or negative influencing factor in a YP's adolescence and are placed within the centre of Bronfenbrenner's model in the Microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1992). Secondary school staff are positioned as a bridge into post-16 EET and could provide valuable information about how practice and transitions currently work in Wales, alongside an already well-established relationship with EPs (Welsh Government, 2016). Therefore, school staff who had a specific responsibility for supporting YP who were at risk of becoming NEET were included in this research to understand how they are currently construing their role in preparing YP for life beyond school, and what they think is or is not working.

I initially thought that my project would involve interviewing EPs due to my interest in the profession. However, as my research process developed and I further considered the limited current research base surrounding post-16 work, and even less focusing on NEET YP. Although EP participants could have provided useful insights that could have been drawn from current perceptions about how the role may develop, I decided that EPs might not be in the best position to answer my amended research question about current practice in Wales.

Another consideration was given to including the views of YP, however, due to the nature and definition of being NEET, YP themselves are often hidden and unreachable from professionals (Li, Liu, & Wong, 2018). This means that their voices are often underrepresented in research and I considered exploring their retrospective views about what support they did or did not find helpful (Gabriel, 2015). However, due to the time restrictions of this research project it was decided that recruitment may be too difficult to implement. In hindsight, this decision was the correct one as the Covid-19 pandemic could have exacerbated recruitment difficulties further. Another reason YP were not included was due to concern over whether they would be able to accurately recollect the support that they were given, as previous research found that YP found it difficult to remember what support they had received whilst at school (Currie & Goodall, 2009).

While collecting my data, I occasionally questioned my participant group selection due to further professionals and services that I had not considered being raised during the interviews. With this in mind, further research should consider the inclusion of youth workers and Careers Wales professionals due to their considerable role supporting this group of YP. However, my research aim was to triangulate information from different professionals to get a picture of what practice is currently like in LAs in Wales. I feel like this was successfully achieved and each professional group offered a unique perspective of support for YP who are at risk of becoming NEET.

2.5 Data collection

Initially, I attended an annual meeting for NEET Leads from LAs across Wales and received many enthusiastic and keen responses about participating in my research which greatly benefitted that professional groups recruitment. However, the occurrence of the Covid-19 pandemic significantly affected recruitment of EWOs and school staff. In some ways, the pandemic and use of virtual interviews helped to minimize traveling time to different Welsh LAs and professionals were more likely to agree to take part due to it being less of a time commitment (Hanna & Mwale, 2017). However, staff were busy adjusting to the new ways of working and emails often went without replies. The barriers I experienced included limited amount of EWOs within each LA, which meant if I had no volunteers from that LA then I had little option about what to do next. Another significant difficulty was that schools were closed at the beginning of my recruitment period and therefore a decision was made to postpone recruiting school staff until they returned in September 2020. Despite this delay, even when schools reopened, staff had hectic schedules and I had many replies to say that participation was not possible. I later reflected on the schools who did agree to participate

and whether their views are representative of secondary schools generally, especially due to their positivity and enthusiasm about the work they do to support YP who are at risk of becoming NEET, in the face of such challenging circumstances.

Determining how many participants are adequate for a research project is frequently discussed and it has been argued that saturation of data is a more important factor to consider (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Creswell, 2009; Dworkin, 2012). Saturation is argued to have been reached “*when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical categories*” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 113). When considering my dataset, I feel like saturation was reached within the NEET lead group as there was strong commonality of themes across all five participants. However, on reflection further participants would have been helpful for the EWO and school staff groups if recruitment difficulties had not been encountered.

2.6 Transcription and translation

All ten participant interviews were recorded, and orthographically transcribed following guidelines set out by Braun and Clarke (2013). I used the Microsoft Word transcribe function to initially process my interview recordings. Using a transcription software is argued to be a logical choice for researchers to save time when transcribing long and in-depth recordings (Creswell, 2009). However, this transcription method produced many errors and still required me to listen to the interviews several times while correcting these errors. On reflection, this was a really important time for myself as the researcher to become immersed in the data and I began to think about commonalities and arising themes. This also led to the privilege of hindsight when I heard occasions I had missed opportunities to ask follow-up questions. In the future I would be reluctant to use transcription software if it meant missing listening to the recordings myself.

2.7 Analysis

The finished transcripts were then used to carry out an in-depth analysis, where making notes would not have been adequate (Willig, 2013). Thematic Analysis (TA) was chosen to analyse my data using Braun and Clarke’s (2020) six stage analysis (see Appendix K). TA has only relatively recently been acknowledged as a qualitative research method in its own right despite researchers arguing that “*thematizing meaning has been described as a generic skill which forms the basis of much, if not most, qualitative research*” (Willig, 2013, p. 58). It has previously been argued to be more of a tool

or skill that is used across other methods, rather than a research method on its own (Ryan & Bernard, 2000).

As an emerging researcher, it was felt that conducting my first major research project using TA was the most accessible to use, and it provided a flexible, rich and detailed analysis of my data (Braun & Clarke, 2013; 2020). An inductive form of analysis was used to establish themes by using a bottom-up approach where themes emerge from the data itself, rather than through a pre-existing theory (Creswell, 2009; Willig, 2013). Using an inductive form helped to ensure that I did not put my own meaning and bias onto what my participants said (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Creswell, 2009).

Although TA can be used to encompass multiple perspectives, I decided to conduct three separate analyses for each group of professionals to ensure that the individual voices and unique contribution to supporting YP who are at risk of becoming NEET was not lost (Creswell, 2009). It is argued that to collect sufficient data for a TA, between six and ten interviews should be included (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Although the individual analyses contained less than this, the combined dataset and the generated themes from all ten interviews were used to complete the discussion and implications of this research.

After becoming familiarised with my data, I conducted my initial coding using NVivo, a programme aimed to assist with coding and analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This programme is argued to increase the organisation and efficiency of the coding process which I personally valued as well to develop my initial codes (Braun & Clarke, 2013). On reflection, I spent a long time on this part of the analysis producing a large number of codes due to worrying that I would miss out something important. During supervision, I was supported to see that my analysis was becoming more of a detailed content analysis and I needed to be more reflexive about what my data was telling me, more than coding each individual sentence in the transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2020).

I felt that using NVivo for generating themes would affect my ability to interpret the data myself, as the programme is often criticised for focusing on frequency of a code despite this not being a determinant of importance or significance of a theme (Braun & Clarke; Willig, 2013). Braun and Clarke (2013, 2020) argue that a true TA requires the researcher's deep understanding and immersion in the data. Therefore, I manually carried out the generating, developing and refining of themes (Stages 3-6 in Appendix K) to ensure I was fully engaged in my data set and did not miss anything out.

Theming can be complicated, especially when working with large data sets, which on reflection I experienced with the NEET lead participant group (Willig, 2013). Willig (2013, p. 58) states “...there is an assumption that to identify themes is a relatively straightforward undertaking as it involves nothing more than giving a label to something that stands out”. Inductive forms of analysis use a higher level of interpretation, and although there is no one correct way to theme the data, regular discussion with my supervisor was an important part of the process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Willig, 2013). Triangulation is a helpful tool to cross-check themes with different researchers to help increase the trustworthiness, reliability and validity of data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Consideration was given to using an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) due to its ability to provide a richer and more in-depth picture of participant’s experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Willig, 2013). However, it was felt that a broad exploration of professional practice would not produce the level of depth in the data that is required for an IPA analysis (Willig, 2013). On reflection, using reflexive TA provided an appropriate and robust six stage process to analyse data across a range of participant groups.

2.8 Ethical concerns

Gaining ethical approval for this project was sought from the School Research Ethics Committee and steps were put in place to ensure that confidentiality and anonymity were maintained appropriately, and participants were fully informed of the research before agreeing to take part. The original data collection method was adapted to virtual interviews, with an information sheet, consent form and debrief sheet now all being provided via email (see appendix H, I and J). Participants were able to withdraw at any point up until individual data had been transcribed and anonymised. There was no deception and participants were fully informed about the intentions of the research (Willig, 2013).

Since completing data collection, several participants requested to receive an update or copy of my results once the research process was finished. Although I am aware that my research may offer “interpretations of their accounts that do not tally with their own understanding of their experience”, it has led me to consider whether the professionals that took part in this study would be satisfied with my interpretation of their contribution (Willig, 2013, p. 26). In future research projects I might adopt a participatory or active listening approach to cross check the themes I have found with the participants (Billington, 2018).

4.0 Contribution to knowledge

3.1 Origin of the research topic

My interest in this topic began during my second-year fieldwork placement as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP). Throughout the Doctoral training, TEPs are required to meet a list of competencies to ensure breadth and depth of experiences necessary for entering the profession of educational psychology. It was on this placement that my interest grew in seeking out experiences in the post-16 sector. However, when enquiring about possible casework and opportunities, it became clear that this was largely unknown to the EPs within the service. In Wales, legislative changes to the ALN Code of Practice will require EPs to extend their remit from 19 to 25 years by the end of 2021 (Welsh Government, 2018). However, I had naively assumed that some of these processes and systems to extend the EP role had already begun. This ignited questions about what currently happens to YP after they have left secondary school, especially those who previously received additional support. YP are required to remain in compulsory education or training up until aged 19, and I began to wonder which professionals provided support post-16 and what current practice looked like (Education and Skills Act, 2008).

I attempted to answer these questions by organising a meeting with members of the youth service team who first introduced me to the term NEET. Previously in university sessions and opportunities in placement, awareness and training was provided using terms such as Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) or chronic non-attenders and how as EPs we might be able to support pre-16. However, I had never come across the term NEET which led me to wonder what happens to these YP if they continue not attending or participating in post-16 EET. I met with a YEPFC who spoke with me about the purpose of the role which involved ensuring that all YP post-16 are engaged in some form of EET. He spoke with me about the complex YP that are referred to him for additional support and how sometimes he felt he was on his own to support them. He emphasised that some of the complexities YP faced were very difficult to solve and that he would really value and appreciate input from the EP team and I began to wonder whether other LAs had similar issues.

3.2 Exploring gaps in the literature

Since the definition of being NEET was first noted in the *Bridging the Gap* report in 1999, there has been both a political and social interest in reducing the numbers of YP that fall into this category

(Social Exclusion Unit, 1999; Yates & Payne, 2006). There is currently a large array of professionals that are involved both preventatively and responsively supporting YP who are identified as at risk of becoming NEET to transition into adulthood as well as to support those YP who have already disengaged (Arnold & Baker, 2013; Nelson & O'Donnell, 2012). However, there is currently limited research about how these professionals and services work in practice to support YP who either are or at risk of becoming NEET or where EP input would be valuable and effective in improving outcomes.

As previously discussed, a literature search surrounding the EP role within the post-16 sector demonstrated that this area is only now beginning to emerge and be explored by the profession (Morris & Atkinson, 2018). The majority of existing research has been carried out in Scotland, where EPs have contributed to the post-16 sector for over 10 years already (Crichton & Hellier, 2009; Hellier, 2009). When I narrowed down this search to include EPs and YP who are at risk of becoming NEET, I realised that this was extremely limited.

3.3 Relevance of research findings to existing knowledge

Conducting a systematic literature review helped to provide a comprehensive synthesis of what current EP focused research has identified as important for YP who are at risk of becoming NEET and what are the implications for EP practice. From the included studies, most participants were YP, which helped to shed light on an often-unheard voice (Li, Liu, & Wong, 2018). This contributed to a theme that incorporated strategies that YP identified as important to them when engaging in EET, which included having positive and supportive relationships, being heard and listened to and having autonomy and control over their lives when entering adulthood (Bason, 2020; Billington, 2018). A second theme highlighted what professionals can do to help, including strategies that arguably should be integral to all EET settings, for example, providing a key adult, as well as wider systemic considerations about multi-agency practice (Craig, 2009; Morris & Atkinson, 2018).

The outcomes of this systematic review offer a potentially valuable analysis of what EPs identify as important, however, my empirical study aimed to supplement these findings with what current practice actually looks like for professionals in Wales. By including three different professionals, my research highlighted a diversity of positive practice in place, including the use of early identification tools, and collaborative efforts to ensure YP receive a good pre-16 educational experience in order to prevent future disengagement. It shed light on the importance of effective multi-agency working

and although areas of good practice were found, professionals reported that this was not always easy. Participants noted that inconsistent and target-orientated funding was a current barrier to deliver and tailor support in a way that suited the diversity of each individual LA. Most importantly it identified how EP services that exist within each LA could effectively work with this vulnerable and complex group of YP, their families and the professionals who work with them to support practice through the application of psychology. Also, it was able to make some tentative conclusions for Welsh Government and LA leadership teams about policy for supporting the NEET population.

Using the lens of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, it has helped to explore the views of professionals within the support system of YP who are at risk of becoming NEET. It has helped to highlight that although many aspects of current practice of EWOs, school staff and NEET leads are making a strong contribution, there are sometimes gaps between policy (Macrosystem) and practice (Microsystem) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1992). It has also helped to highlight the limited application of psychological understanding that currently takes place to help contribute to these processes.

The findings from the empirical study not only add to the knowledge base about what is important for all professionals who support YP who are at risk of becoming NEET, it also provides a unique insight into current Welsh practice.

3.4 Relevance to the practice of EPs and other professionals

The relevance of the current research to EP practice is explicitly discussed within both the systematic literature review and the empirical paper.

When discussed together, both have highlighted implications for EPs across all levels of current practice, from individuals, groups, EET provision and wider systems (Welsh Government, 2016). All the outcomes for EP practice point to the importance of the profession to raise awareness and embed preventative practice to reduce YP disengaging from education and becoming NEET. This could include using current skills to directly support within the microsystem, for example, with the YP themselves, families or EET settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), offering psychological knowledge, effectively eliciting the voices of YP, supporting and working with families and collaborating with EET settings by providing training and supervision. Systemic implications for EP practice within a YP's Macrosystem, include contributing to LA level post-16 transition procedures and forging links with

post-16 services to facilitate collaborative multi-agency working to ensure all YP are receiving adequate support.

In addition to the relevance on EP practice, I propose that this research has wider implications to policy developers and Welsh Government, as referred to within Part A and Part B. It raises awareness of the importance for policies to continue to develop multi-professional practice so services can work together effectively. It highlights that appropriate funding arrangements and adequate post-16 provision need to be available to LAs so that diverse, tailored and effective preventative support can be implemented. Government and LA policy have the potential to both positively or negatively influence the numbers of YP that become NEET and this research has helped to highlight the importance that they effectively address the complexities of YP's lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Hodgson & Spours, 2015).

3.5 Relevance to personal practice

Carrying out this research project and analysing my findings, has supported my appreciation of the positive impact and influence EPs could have at a systemic and strategic level. Prior to my doctoral training, I mainly supported individual children and YP and knew that when entering the EP profession this type of support would reduce in frequency. However, this research project has given me an increased appreciation of the positive influence EPs can have on wider, systemic issues to promote positive change for many YP. On reflection, I feel that EP influence at a systemic level is especially important when supporting YP who are at risk of becoming NEET due to the large number of services and professionals that play a part. If EPs were to only undertake individual casework with YP, or even with individual schools, the wider implications of improving support for YP across all services might be missed.

3.6 Dissemination

The dissemination of findings is an important follow-on from any piece of research and "professionals have a role in ensuring the key research evidence is promoted" (Freemantle & Watt, 1994, p. 133). This includes using "multiple means" to communicate the key messages (Freemantle & Watt, 1994, p. 133).

At a personal level, I will ensure I am able to promote the key messages of my research in my first role as a qualified EP to my new team. I believe it is important to incorporate thinking about YP who are at risk of becoming NEET into secondary school planning meetings to promote and embed the importance of preventative work at a school level. This includes thinking about the common risk factors for becoming NEET and whether school staff feel equipped to support these YP. It would also be helpful to develop whole school training about how best to support the continued engagement of all YP through an understanding of belongingness and what to be aware of when approaching post-16 transition.

At a LA level, during my final placement there has been temporary extension to the EP role to provide additional support to the youth service. I have been asked to feedback my research findings as part of this support, as well as to disseminate this information to the EP team and wider management within the LA. This research has helped to develop recommendations that would support the professionals who work with YP directly on a daily basis. It is hoped that my findings will promote the importance of maintaining collaborative working between EPs and the youth service and ensure it becomes a more permanent arrangement. My findings could help to evidence the cost-effectiveness of investing in preventative strategies to support YP who are at risk of becoming NEET.

In order to disseminate my results to a wider population within Wales and the UK, I would seek to publish my research in an EP related journal. This would help to raise awareness of YP who are at risk of becoming NEET within the EP profession and the important role we could have in services across Wales. Opportunities could also be sought to discuss and present my thesis findings at future conferences or seminars that may be appropriate. This is especially important when EP services in Wales are beginning to think and plan their policies and systems to support the post-16 sector. It would also be an opportunity to highlight the good practice that is being carried out within Wales.

4.0 Summary

In conclusion, this critical appraisal set out to evaluate the choices I made throughout the undertaking of this research and to consider its contribution to current knowledge. This included my epistemological and ontological positions, and how these influenced other decisions such as the research methods and participant selection. Reasons for limitations were addressed, and what I would have done differently identified. Publishing the findings in journals where EPs could access

the current study, in addition to the wider range of professionals who work with YP who are at risk of becoming NEET, could encourage further exploration of the areas discussed. The critical appraisal provided a useful opportunity for me to engage in reflective and reflexive practice, and therefore develop my skills as a researcher and identify how I could incorporate the findings into future practice.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Full list of search terms for systematic literature review.

Systematic searches were performed between August and September 2020 using the following electronic databases: PsycInfo, Applied Social Science Index (ASSIA), Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC), British Education Index (BEI), Scopus and Web of Science (WoS).

The search terms used in all databases were “NEET”, “not in education”, “youth unemployment”, “transition”, “post-16”, “16-25”, “employment status”, “school to work transition”, “school dropout”, “school truancy”, “occupational guidance”, “post-school psychology” OR “career education” AND ‘educational psychology’ OR ‘school psychology’. The table below summarises the number of results found in each electronic database.

Database	Results
Psycinfo	54 papers
ASSIA	70 papers
Scopus	127 papers
WoS	131 papers
BEI	80 papers
ERIC	183 papers

Appendix B – Excluded studies from Systematic Literature Review with reasons

Reference	Reason for Exclusion
Arnold, C., & Baker, T. (2013). <i>Becoming NEET: risks, rewards, and realities</i> . IOEPress	Duplicate publication surrounding research on the early identification screener. The empirical paper was included.
Atkinson, C., Hyde, R., & Kelly, C. (2018). Working with care leavers: A model for effective transition to adulthood. In B. Apter, C. Arnold & J. Hardy (Ed.), <i>Applied Educational Psychology with 16-25 year olds. New frameworks and perspectives for working with young people</i> (pp. 218-239). IOE Press	Did not meet IC (Inclusion Criteria): an empirical investigation paper containing either qualitative or quantitative data or a systematic review
Attwood, S., & Atkinson. (2020). Supporting a post-16 student with learning difficulties using human givens therapy. <i>Educational & Child Psychology, 37</i> (2), 34-47	Did not meet IC: the research focus was on YP who are or at risk of becoming NEET, supporting and re-engaging YP aged 16-25 in EET or a focus on post-16 transition
Boden, T. (2020). Cognitive behavioural therapy in a further education setting to support an adolescent experiencing low mood. <i>Educational & Child Psychology, 37</i> (3), 40-556	Did not meet IC: the research focus was on YP who are or at risk of becoming NEET, supporting and re-engaging YP aged 16-25 in EET or a focus on post-16 transition
Cockerill, T., & Arnold, C. (2018). Preventing young people becoming NEET: The importance of early intervention, transition from school and how educational psychologists can make a positive impact. In B. Apter, C. Arnold, & J. Hardy (Eds.), <i>Applied Educational Psychology with 16-15 year olds. New frameworks and perspectives for working with young people</i> (pp. 198–217). IOE Press.	Did not meet IC: an empirical investigation paper containing either qualitative or quantitative data or a systematic review
Fayette, R., & Bond, C. (2018). Listening to the voices of young adults with autism and severe	Did not meet IC: does not primarily focus on a specific ALN

learning difficulties: The transition to adulthood. In B. Apter, C. Arnold & J. Hardy (Eds.), <i>Applied Educational Psychology with 16-25 year olds. New frameworks and perspectives for working with young people</i> (pp. 151-168). IOE Press	
Hayton, R. (2009). Young people growing up in rural communities: Opportunities for educational psychologists to work with emerging adults. <i>Educational & Child Psychology, 26(1)</i> , 60-66	Did not meet IC: an empirical investigation paper containing either qualitative or quantitative data or a systematic review
Hellier, C. (2009). Developing Post-School Psychological Services in Scotland: Fit for purpose?. <i>Educational & Child Psychology, 26(1)</i> , 22-32	Did not meet IC: an empirical investigation paper containing either qualitative or quantitative data or a systematic review
Jago, N., Wright, S., Hartwell, B, K., & Green, R. (2020). Mental health beyond the school gate: Young people’s perspectives of mental health support online, and in home, school and community contexts. <i>Educational & Child Psychology, 37(3)</i> , 69-85	Did not meet IC: the research focus was on YP who are or at risk of becoming NEET, supporting and re-engaging YP aged 16-25 in EET or a focus on post-16 transition
MacKay, T. (2009). Post-School Educational Psychology Services: International perspectives on a distinctive Scottish development. <i>Educational & Child Psychology, 26(1)</i> , 8-21	Did not meet IC: an empirical investigation paper containing either qualitative or quantitative data or a systematic review
MacKay, T. (2020). Post-school educational psychology services: The historical and international context. <i>Educational & Child Psychology, 37(2)</i> , 8-19	Did not meet IC: an empirical investigation paper containing either qualitative or quantitative data or a systematic review
Selfe, A., Pelter, G., & Relton, S. (2018). Multi-agency collaborations for the 16-25 age group: Strengths, obstacles and confusions. In B. Apter, C. Arnold & J. Hardy (Eds.), <i>Applied Educational Psychology with 16-25 year olds.</i>	Did not meet IC: an empirical investigation paper containing either qualitative or quantitative data or a systematic review

<p><i>New frameworks and perspectives for working with young people</i> (pp. 260-279). IOE Press</p>	
<p>Thompson, D. A., & Leyden, G. A. (1985). 'Gissa Job!' Youth Unemployment and Educational Psychologists. <i>Educational Psychology in Practice</i>, 1(1), 1-9</p>	<p>Did not meet IC: published during or after the year 2009</p>
<p>Yu, T. I. (2020). Challenging transition: A socio-cultural understanding of career awareness and development for secondary students with disabilities. <i>Educational & Child Psychology</i>, 37(2), 20-33</p>	<p>Did not meet IC: based in the UK</p>

Appendix C – NEET Lead Semi-structured interview schedule

Further Prompt questions are in italics

“Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. Before we begin, I just want to explain that the following questions have been separated into different sections, to try and help make the information I’m gathering as clear as possible. My first few questions will cover some background information about yourself and your role before moving on to explore how young people at risk of becoming or who are NEET are supported within your local authority and whether there are any differences between the support given to these two groups of young people. Next, there will be some questions about how young people with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) are supported if they are or at risk of becoming NEET too. The interview will finish with some questions about transitions to post-16 provisions.

It is important to note that I am particularly interested in the role of the EP and how the profession should develop to support young people who are or at risk of becoming NEET.”

Introduction – Background Information

- What is your current experience of working with young people who are NEET or who are at risk of becoming NEET?
 - *What role were you in to gain that experience?*

- Could you tell me a bit about what your current job involves?
 - *How long have you been in this job?*
 - *Who else within the local authority supports your role?*

- How much of your time (each week? Month?) are you able to spend supporting young people who are or who are at risk of becoming NEET?
 - *Is this time protected?*
 - *Does this time vary much throughout the course of the year?*

Young people at risk of becoming or who are NEET

- How does your local authority identify young people who are at risk of becoming or who are NEET?

- *Once a young person has been identified, what happens next?*
- *Do you think some young people get missed out using this system?*
- *What constitutes a young person being at risk of or NEET?*

- Now a young person has been identified as at risk of becoming or who is NEET, what support are they able to access from yourself and the local authority?
 - *Could you tell me more about how that is set up?*
 - *Who carries out this support?*
 - *Do you liaise with any other professionals? EPs?*
 - *Is there anything else you can think of?*
 - *Can you tell me a bit more about the differences between the support given to a young person who is at risk of or who is NEET?*

- What do you think about this current level of support?
 - *Do you think the young people are receiving the correct amount of support? Too much? Too little?*
 - *Why do you think that?*
 - *Do you come up against any challenges when support is being implemented?*
 - *Are there different challenges encountered whether they are at risk or already are NEET?*

- If you could change the support young people at risk of becoming or who are NEET receive, what would this be and why?
 - *Are there differences between the changes you'd like to see for young people who are at risk or who already are NEET?*

- Do you monitor any impact from the support the young people are given who are at risk of becoming NEET?
 - *What indicators do you use?*
 - *Is it easy to do this?*
 - *What do the monitoring results suggest about the support given? Any differences between at risk young people or those who are NEET?*

- Is there anything unique about your local authority which affects how you can support young people who are at risk of becoming NEET?
 - *Is there anything that you do that you're particularly proud of?*
 - *Are there any benefits or limitations to this?*
 - *Why do you think that this?*

Young People with ALN

- Now thinking specifically about young people who have an ALN (identified or possible), does the process of identifying whether they are or at risk of becoming NEET differ?
 - *What does this look like?*
 - *Do you think some young people get missed out using this system?*
 - *Once a young person has been identified, what happens next?*

- Do pupils with ALN get any additional support to that which you identified earlier?
 - *How does this differ for pupils without an ALN?*
 - *Could you tell me more about how that is set up?*
 - *Does this differ dependent on the type of ALN? For example, anxiety, challenging behaviour, etc?*
 - *Who carries out this support?*
 - *Do you liaise with any other professionals outside of the school? What about an EP?*

- What do you think about this current level of support for pupils with ALN?
 - *Do you think these young people are receiving the correct amount of support? Too much? Too little?*
 - *In your opinion, are the ALN needs of these young people being met?*
 - *Are there any challenges you come up against?*

- If you could change the support young people with identified or possible ALN receive, what would this be and why?

- Is there any additional monitoring of the impact of your support for pupils ALN that differs to what you explained to me earlier?
 - *What indicators do you use?*
 - *Is it easy to do this?*

- *What do the monitoring results suggest?*

Post-16 Transition

- Could you tell me about how transitions currently work between schools and Post-16 provisions for all pupils in your Local Authority?
 - *Which professionals support young people's transitions? EPs?*
 - *Does this process differ dependent on a young person's ALN?*
- Is there extra support available for the young people who have been identified as at risk of becoming or who are NEET to transition into a Post-16 provision?
 - *Could you tell me more about how that is set up?*
 - *Who qualifies for this support?*
 - *Who carries this out?*
 - *Does this differ dependent on whether a young people is at risk or who are already NEET?*
- Do you feel like the current support for transitions is successful?
 - *Do you think the young people are receiving the correct amount of support? Too much? Too little?*
 - *Why do you think that is?*
 - *In your opinion, are the ALN needs of these young people being met?*
- Is the success or failure of these transitions monitored?
 - *How is this done?*
 - *Is it easy to do this?*
 - *What indicators do you use?*
 - *What does the monitoring currently suggest about the success of young people's transitions?*
- If you could change the support young people get when transitioning into a Post-16 provision, what would this be and why?

- Is there anything unique about your local authority which affects how you can support young people who are at risk or are already NEET transition into Post-16 provisions?
 - *Is there anything that you do that you are particularly proud of?*
 - *Are there any benefits and limitations of that?*
 - *Why do you think that is?*

Ending

- And finally, is there anything about the current support for young people who are or at risk of becoming NEET that you'd like to add, and you feel I haven't covered in my questions?

Appendix D – EWO semi-structured interview schedule

Further Prompt questions are in italics

“Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. Before we begin, I just want to explain that the following questions have been separated into different sections, to try and help make the information I’m gathering as clear as possible. My first few questions will cover some background information about yourself and your role before moving on to explore how young people at risk of becoming or who are NEET are supported within your local authority and whether there are any differences between the support given to these two groups of young people. Next, there will be some questions about how young people with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) are supported if they are or at risk of becoming NEET too. The interview will then finish with some questions about transitions to post-16 provisions.

It is important to note that I am particularly interested in the role of the EP and how the profession should develop to support young people who are or risk of becoming NEET.”

Introduction – Background Information

- What is your current experience of working with young people who are NEET or who are at risk of becoming NEET?
 - *What role were you in to gain that experience?*

- Could you tell me a bit about what your current job involves?
 - *How long have you been in this job?*
 - *Who else within the local authority supports your role?*

- On average, how much of your time (each week? Month?) are you able to spend supporting young people who are NEET or who are at risk of becoming NEET?
 - *Is this time protected?*
 - *Does this time vary much throughout the course of the year?*

Young people at risk of becoming or who are NEET

- How does your local authority identify young people who are at risk of becoming NEET?
 - *Once a young person has been identified, what happens next?*

- *Do you think some young people get missed out using this system?*
- *What constitutes a young person being at risk of or NEET?*

- Now a young person has been identified as at risk of becoming NEET, what support are they able to access from yourself and the local authority?
 - *Could you tell me more about how that is set up?*
 - *Who carries out this support?*
 - *Do you liaise with any other professionals? EPs?*
 - *Is there anything else you can think of?*
 - *Can you tell me a bit more about the differences between the support given to a young person who is at risk of or who is NEET?*

- What do you think about this current level of support?
 - *Do you think the young people are receiving the correct amount of support? Too much? Too little?*
 - *Why do you think that?*
 - *Do you come up against any challenges when support is being implemented?*
 - *Are there different challenges encountered whether they are at risk or already are NEET?*

- If you could change the support young people at risk of becoming NEET receive, what would this be and why?
 - *Are there differences between the changes you'd like to see for young people who are at risk or who already are NEET?*

- Do you monitor any impact from the support the young people are given who are at risk of becoming NEET?
 - *What indicators do you use?*
 - *Is it easy to do this?*
 - *What do the monitoring results suggest about the support given? Any differences between at risk young people or those who are NEET?*

- Is there anything unique about your local authority which affects how you can support young people who are at risk of becoming NEET?

- *Is there anything you do that you are particularly proud of?*
- *Are there any benefits or limitations to this?*
- *Why do you think that this?*

Young People with ALN

- Now thinking specifically about young people who have an ALN (identified or possible), does the process of identifying whether they are or at risk of becoming NEET differ?
 - *What does this look like?*
 - *Do you think some young people get missed out using this system?*
 - *Once a young person has been identified, what happens next?*

- Do pupils with ALN get any additional or different support to that which you identified earlier?
 - *How does this differ for pupils without an ALN?*
 - *Could you tell me more about how that is set up?*
 - *Does this differ dependent on the type of ALN? For example, anxiety, challenging behaviour, etc?*
 - *Who carries out this support?*
 - *Do you liaise with any other professionals outside of the school? What about an EP?*

- What do you think about this current level of support for pupils with ALN?
 - *Do you think these young people are receiving the correct amount of support? Too much? Too little?*
 - *In your opinion, are the ALN needs of these young people being met?*
 - *Are there any challenges you come up against?*

- If you could change the support young people with identified or possible ALN receive, what would this be and why?

- Is there any additional monitoring of the impact of your support for pupils ALN that differs to what you explained to me earlier?
 - *What indicators do you use?*
 - *Is it easy to do this?*
 - *What do the monitoring results suggest?*

Post-16 Transition

- Could you now tell me about how transitions currently work between schools and Post-16 provisions?
 - *Which professionals currently support young people's transitions? EPs?*
 - *Does this process differ dependent on a young person's ALN?*

- Is there extra support available for the young people who have been identified as at risk of becoming NEET to transition into a Post-16 provision?
 - *Could you tell me more about how that is set up?*
 - *Who qualifies for this support?*
 - *Who carries this out?*

- What support is available for the young people who have been identified as being NEET to transition into a Post-16 provision?
 - *Could you tell me more about how that is set up?*
 - *Who qualifies for this support?*
 - *Who carries this out?*

- Do you feel like the current support for transitions is successful?
 - *Do you think the young people are receiving the correct amount of support? Too much? Too little?*
 - *Why do you think that is?*
 - *In your opinion, are the ALN needs of these young people being met?*

- Is the success or failure of these transitions monitored?
 - *How is this done?*
 - *Is it easy to do this?*
 - *What indicators do you use?*
 - *What does the monitoring currently suggest about the success of young people's transitions?*

- If you could change the support young people get when transitioning into a Post-16 provision, what would this be and why?

- Is there anything unique about your local authority which affects how you can support young people who are at risk or are already NEET transition into Post-16 provisions?
 - *Is there anything that you do that you are particularly proud of?*
 - *Are there any benefits and limitations of that?*
 - *Why do you think that is?*

Ending

- And finally, is there anything about the current support for young people who are or at risk of becoming NEET that you'd like to add, and you feel I haven't covered in my questions?

Appendix E – School staff semi-structured interview schedule

Further prompt questions are in italics

“Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. Before we begin, I just want to explain that the following questions have been separated into different sections, to try and help make the information I’m gathering as clear as possible. My first few questions will cover some background information about yourself and your role before moving on to explore how young people at risk of becoming NEET are supported within your school. Then the questions will directly explore what happens within your school if a young person does become NEET followed by some questions with more focus on young people with Additional Learning Needs who either are or at risk of becoming NEET too. The interview will then finish with some questions about transitions to post-16 provisions. It is also important to note that I am particularly interested in the role of the EP and how the profession should develop to support young people who are or at risk of becoming NEET.”

Introduction – Background Information

- What is your current experience of working with young people who are NEET or who are at risk of becoming NEET?
 - *What role were you in to experience that?*

- Could you tell me a bit about what your current job involves?
 - *Who else within the school supports your role?*
 - *How long have you been in this job?*

- On average, how much of your time each (week? month?) are you able to spend supporting young people who are NEET or who are at risk of becoming NEET?
 - *Is this time protected?*
 - *Will this time vary much over the course of a year?*

Young people at risk of becoming NEET

- How does your school identify young people who are at risk of becoming NEET?
 - *Once a young person has been identified, what happens next?*
 - *Do you think some young people get missed out using this system?*

- Now a young person has been identified as at risk of becoming NEET, what support are they able to access?
 - *Could you tell me more about how that is set up?*
 - *Who carries out this support?*
 - *Do you liaise with any other professionals outside of the school? What about an EP?*
 - *Is there anything else you can think of?*

- What do you think about this current level of support?
 - *Do you think the young people are receiving the correct amount of support? Too much? Too little?*
 - *Why do you think that is?*
 - *Do you come up against any challenges?*
 - *Do you think these young people leave prepared for life beyond school?*

- Are there any unmet needs?

- If you could change the support young people receive, what would this be and why?

- Do you monitor any impact from the support you are providing?
 - *What indicators do you use?*
 - *Is it easy to do this?*
 - *What do the monitoring results suggest?*

- Is there anything unique about your school which affects how you can support young people who are at risk of becoming NEET?
 - *Is there anything you do that you are particularly proud of?*
 - *Are there any benefits or limitations to this?*
 - *Why do you think that this?*

Young people who are NEET

- How does your school identify young people who have become NEET?
 - *Once a young person has been identified, what happens next?*
 - *Do you think some young people get missed out using this system?*

- What happens if a young person does become NEET?
 - *How are these young people monitored?*
 - *Do you liaise with any other professionals outside of the school?*
 - *What support do you offer as a school?*

- Is there anything unique about your school which affects the support you can give to young people who are NEET?
 - *Is there anything you do that you are particularly proud of?*
 - *Are there any benefits and limitations of that?*
 - *Why do you think that this?*

Young People with ALN

- Now thinking specifically about your pupils who have an ALN (identified or possible), does the process of identifying whether they are or at risk of becoming NEET differ?
 - *What does this look like?*
 - *Do you think some young people get missed out using this system?*
 - *Once a young person has been identified, what happens next?*

- Do pupils with ALN get any additional or different support to that which you identified earlier?
 - *How does this differ for pupils without an ALN?*
 - *Could you tell me more about how that is set up?*
 - *Does this differ dependent on the type of ALN? For example, anxiety, challenging behaviour, etc?*
 - *Who carries out this support?*
 - *Do you liaise with any other professionals outside of the school? What about an EP?*

- What do you think about this current level of support for pupils with ALN?
 - *Do you think these young people are receiving the correct amount of support? Too much? Too little?*
 - *In your opinion, are the ALN needs of these young people being met?*
 - *Are there any challenges you come up against?*

- If you could change the support young people with identified or possible ALN receive, what would this be and why?
- Is there any additional monitoring of the impact of your support for pupils ALN that differs to what you explained to me earlier?
 - *What indicators do you use?*
 - *Is it easy to do this?*
 - *What do the monitoring results suggest?*

Post-16 Transition

- Could you now tell me about how the transitions work between your school and Post-16 provisions?
 - *Do you liaise with any other professionals outside of the school?*
 - *Does this process differ if a young person has an ALN?*
- What support is available for the young people who have been identified as at risk of becoming NEET to transition into a Post-16 provision?
 - *Could you tell me more about how that is set up?*
 - *Who qualifies for this support?*
 - *Does this support differ for those young people who are already NEET?*
 - *Who carries this out?*
 - *Do you liaise with any other professionals outside of the school?*
 - *Does this support differ if a pupil has an ALN?*
- How do you feel that this support is going?
 - *Is the transition process successful?*
 - *Do you think the young people are receiving the correct amount of support? Too much or too little?*
 - *Why do you think that is?*
 - *In your opinion, are the ALN needs of young people being met in regards to transitions?*
- If you could change the support during transitions that young people receive, what would this be and why?

- Is there anything unique about your school which affects how you can support young people who are at risk of becoming NEET transition into Post-16 provisions?
 - *Is there anything you do that you are particularly proud of?*
 - *Why do you think that this?*
 - *Are there any benefits and limitations of that?*

Ending

- And finally, is there anything about the current support for young people who are or at risk of becoming NEET that you'd like to add and you feel I haven't covered in my questions?

Appendix F – LA Gatekeeper letter



School of Psychology,
Cardiff University,
CUCHS,
30 Park Place,
Cardiff,
CF10 3AT

Director of Education

Address

Date

Dear Head of Education,

I am writing to you as a Trainee Educational Psychologist from Cardiff University. As part of the requirements of my training I am hoping to conduct my thesis project investigating how Educational Psychologists (EPs) can support young people who are or at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) and who have ALN (Additional Learning Needs). I am enquiring whether it will be possible to carry out this research with the Lead NEET staff member, an Education Welfare Officer (EWO) and a school staff member within your Local Authority.

During my study, I am planning to talk to schools and different Local Authorities about what is currently in place for young people who are or at risk of becoming NEET. My aim is to explore what practice is currently in place, and working to support these young people and to identify areas that could be improved. I am also interested in exploring how Post-16 transitions currently take place, with a focus on the particular needs of young people who are or at risk of becoming NEET.

I am aiming to recruit my participants from 4 different Local Authorities across Wales and conduct individual interviews which will take between 30-45 minutes. A consent form and information sheet will be provided prior to the interview, which does include giving consent to being audio recorded, primarily for the purposes of analysing and interpreting the data.

It is important to note that all information discussed during this interview will be confidential and held securely until it is transcribed. The transcription will be anonymised and the recording will then be deleted, and thereafter no individual local authority/school/staff member will be identifiable. Participants will be reminded not to mention individual's names during the interviews, however if this does occur then names will be replaced with a pseudonym at the point of transcription.

The times and locations for the interview will be arranged to suit the participant's needs in order to minimise disruption.

I hope that you will be interested in working with me on this research project and please feel free to contact me if you have any queries. Alternatively, you may wish to contact my research supervisor, Andrea Higgins (Research Supervisor, Cardiff University) for further information. Please find our contact details at the bottom of this letter.

Many thanks for taking the time to read this and I hope to hear from you soon.

Yours sincerely,

Vanessa Brown

Contact Details of Researcher:

Vanessa Brown, School of Psychology, Cardiff University, CUCHDS, 30 Park Place, Cardiff, CF10 3AT

Email: [XXXXXXXXX](#)

Contact Details of Research Supervisor

Andrea Higgins, School of Psychology, Cardiff University, CUCHDS, 30 Park Place, Cardiff, CF10 3AT

Email: [XXXXXXXXXX](#)

Appendix G – Head Teacher gatekeeper letter



Headteacher
School Address

School of Psychology,
Cardiff University,
CUCHS,
30 Park Place,
Cardiff,
CF10 3AT

Date

Dear Headteacher,

I am writing to you as a Trainee Educational Psychologist from Cardiff University. As part of the requirements of my training I am hoping to conduct my thesis project investigating how Educational Psychologists (EPs) can support young people who are or at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) and who have ALN (Additional Learning Needs). I am enquiring whether it will be possible to carry out this research with a staff member who had/has responsibility for supporting these young people within your school.

During my study, I am planning on talking to schools and different Local Authorities about what is currently in place for young people who are or at risk of becoming NEET. My aim is to explore what practice is currently in place and working to support these young people and to identify what areas could be improved. I am also interested in exploring how Post-16 transitions currently take place, with a focus on the particular needs of those young people who are or at risk of becoming NEET.

I am aiming to recruit 4 participants from different schools across different Local Authorities who have been responsible for supporting young people who are or at risk of becoming NEET for at least one year. I am interested in talking to a staff member who has been directly involved in planning and supporting these pupils, and therefore has significant experience of how the system currently works. Individual interviews will take between 30-45 minutes. A consent form and information sheet will be provided prior to the interview, which does include giving consent to being audio recorded, primarily for the purposes of analysing and interpreting the data.

It is important to note that all information discussed during this interview will remain confidential and held securely until it is transcribed. The transcription will be anonymised and the recording will then be deleted, and thereafter no individual school/staff member will be identifiable. Participants will be reminded not to mention individual names during the interviews, however if this does occur then names will be replaced with a pseudonym at the point of transcription.

The times and locations for the interview will be arranged to suit both the school and participant's needs in order to minimise disruption.

I hope that you will be interested in working with me on this research project and please feel free to contact me if you have any queries. Alternatively, you may wish to contact my research supervisor, Andrea Higgins (Research Supervisor, Cardiff University) for further information. Please find our contact details at the bottom of this letter.

Many thanks for taking the time to read this and I hope to hear from you soon.

Yours sincerely,

Vanessa Brown

Contact Details of Researcher:

Vanessa Brown, School of Psychology, Cardiff University, CUCHDS, 30 Park Place, Cardiff, CF10 3AT

Email: XXXXXXXXXX

Contact Details of Research Supervisor

Andrea Higgins, School of Psychology, Cardiff University, CUCHDS, 30 Park Place, Cardiff, CF10 3AT

Email: XXXXXXXXXX

Information Sheet

The role of Educational Psychologists in supporting young people who are or at risk of becoming NEET in Wales



This research is being conducted by Vanessa Brown (Trainee Educational Psychologist), supervised by Andrea Higgins (Research Supervisor).

Introduction

The majority of young people leave secondary school and transition successfully into various education, employment or training positions. However, during 2019 around 11.6% of young people aged 16-24 in the UK didn't achieve this (Office for National Statistics, 2019). In Wales, 8.4% of 16-18 year olds and 15% of 19-24 year olds were found to be classified as "Not in Education, Employment or Training" (NEET) in 2019 (Welsh Government, 2020). The consequences of young people being NEET during their teenage and young adult lives have been argued to be a powerful predictor of negative lifelong outcomes (Hellier, 2009).

There are many risk factors that have been identified as potentially contributing to a young person becoming persistently NEET which include: previous episodes of school absence or previous episodes of being NEET, engaging in offending behaviour, having an Additional Learning Need, being a child looked after (CLA), substance misuse and pregnancy (Billington, 2018; Gabriel, 2015; Mirza-Davies, 2013). Vulnerable young people, and especially those who have experienced one or more of these risk factors, should receive high-quality support and to help them remain in education, employment or training (Atkinson, Dunsmuir, Lang, & Wright, 2015; Currie & Goodall, 2009; Gabriel, 2015; Hellier, 2009).

New changes in government policy, predicted to come into place in 2021, will see an extension of the role of Educational Psychologists (EPs) that will require them to support young people aged between 0-25years (Welsh Government, 2018). These policies will create significant change to the role of the EP, requiring the profession to change and adapt to support young people who are or at risk of becoming NEET after secondary school.

What is the purpose of this study?

This current study is investigating what contribution EPs can make to support young people who are or at risk of becoming NEET in Wales. The aim is to find out what good practice is already being conducted in schools and Local Authorities to support these young people and maybe identify if there are any areas that need extra support. This should help to highlight areas of practice where EPs could be helping to support young people to re-engage in Post-16 education, employment or training.

Why have I been asked to participate?

You have been asked to participate as your current job role includes supporting young people who are or at risk of becoming NEET to re-engage in education, employment or training. Therefore the contribution of your views and experiences will be extremely valuable.

What happens if I decide to participate?

You will take part in an individual interview which will last approximately 30-45 minutes. This could take place face-to-face or via a video call. I am interested in listening to your views and experiences about what is currently in place for young people who are or at risk of becoming NEET and what you think is currently working and what could be improved.

What are the benefits or risks of taking part?

There are no direct benefits to you for taking part in this research. However, the information you share will provide a greater understanding of how young people who are or at risk of becoming NEET are currently being supported and this can be used to improve practice and outcomes for them.

I do not foresee any risks to yourself from participating in this research, however you can find contact details below if you have any questions before or after the research has taken place.

This project has been reviewed and ethically approved by the School Research Ethics Committee (SREC).

What happens if I change my mind?

You can withdraw from the study at any time and you can decline to answer any questions whilst being interviewed. After your interview has been completed, you can still request that your data is removed from the research until the point of transcription which will happen up to 2 weeks after the

interview. After this point, your data will be anonymous and can't be traced to you and therefore cannot be removed from the study.

What will happen to my information?

The interview will be recorded using a mobile phone device or video call recording technology for the purpose of transcribing. Both methods will either have facial recognition or password security and can only be accessed by the researcher. The audio recording will be stored securely on these devices until it is transcribed by the researcher, after which it will be deleted. Cardiff University will store the anonymous transcriptions indefinitely.

How do you protect my privacy?

All names and personal information will be removed from the transcription and it will not be possible to identify an individual, school or local authority from the transcript. Additionally, no individuals will be identifiable within the final report.

How do I find out about the results?

This research is to be used as a course requirement on the DEdPsy course at Cardiff University. The results will be submitted to the university. The findings will also be shared with the local authority and any participants who may be interested.

Who can I contact for further information?

Contact Details of Researcher:

Vanessa Brown, School of Psychology, Cardiff University, CUCHDS, 30 Park Place, Cardiff, CF10 3AT

Email: XXXXXXXX

Contact Details of Research Supervisor

Andrea Higgins, School of Psychology, Cardiff University, CUCHDS, 30 Park Place, Cardiff, CF10 3AT

Email: XXXXXXXX

Details of Cardiff University's Research Ethics Committee:

School of Psychology, Cardiff University, Tower Building, 30 Park Place, Cardiff, CF10 3AT

Email: XXXXXXXX

Appendix I – Participant consent form



Consent Form

The role of Educational Psychologists in supporting young people who are or at risk of becoming NEET in Wales

Please initial box

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions and these have been answered satisfactorily.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.	
I understand that the researcher would like to conduct an interview which should last approximately 30-45 minutes and will be audio recorded. I understand that I don't need to answer all the questions.	
I understand that the information I provide will be held confidentially by the researcher using a secure device until the interview is transcribed, at which point it will be anonymous.	
I understand that the data from the interview will be transcribed within two weeks. I understand that I can ask for the information I have provided to be deleted/destroyed up until the time the data has been transcribed and anonymised. I understand that after this time, the information will no longer be identifiable to myself and it will not be possible to withdraw.	
I understand that the personal data will be processed in accordance with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).	

Name of participant (print)

Date

Signature

THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN MY RESEARCH

Contact Details of Researcher:

Vanessa Brown, School of Psychology, Cardiff University, CUCHDS, 30 Park Place, Cardiff, CF10 3AT

Email: XXXXXXXXX

Contact Details of Research Supervisor

Andrea Higgins, School of Psychology, Cardiff University, CUCHDS, 30 Park Place, Cardiff, CF10 3AT

Email: XXXXXXXXX

Details of Cardiff University's Research Ethics Committee:

School of Psychology, Cardiff University, Tower Building, 30 Park Place, Cardiff, CF10 3AT

Email: XXXXXXXXX

Debrief Form

The role of Educational Psychologists in supporting young people who are or at risk of becoming NEET in Wales



Thank you for participating in this research project.

The majority of young people leave secondary school and transition successfully into various education, employment or training positions, however during 2019, around 11.6% of young people aged 16-24 in the UK didn't (Office for National Statistics, 2019). In Wales, 8.4% of 16-18 year olds and 15% of 19-24 year olds were found to be classified as "Not in Education, Employment or Training" (NEET) in 2019 (Welsh Government, 2020). The consequences of being NEET during these periods of adolescence and young adulthood have been argued to be a powerful predictor of negative lifelong outcomes (Hellier, 2009).

New changes in government policy, predicted to come into place in 2021, will see an extension of the role of Educational Psychologists (EPs) and will now require them to support young people aged between 0-25 (Welsh Government, 2018). These policies will create significant change to the role of the EP, requiring the profession to adapt to support young people who are or at risk of becoming NEET after secondary school.

This aim of this study was to investigate what contribution EPs can make to support young people who are or at risk of becoming NEET in Wales. This research project aims to find out what good practice is already being conducted in schools and Local Authorities to support these young people and if there were any areas that need extra support. The information you provided should help to highlight areas of practice where EPs could be helping to support young people re-engage in Post-16 education, employment or training.

In order to explore this information, you were asked to take part in a semi-structured interview. As this is an exploratory study, I have no specific hypotheses and I aim to interpret the data obtained during the interviews using thematic analysis. This will enable me to gather themes and form a deeper understanding of how young people are currently being supported.

Before participating in this research, you were provided with an information sheet and were asked to provide signed informed consent. This included giving consent to being audio recorded, primarily for the researcher to analyse and interpret the data. All the responses given by yourself will be held confidentially on a secure device until the interview has been transcribed. Once transcribed, the information will be anonymous and no individual school/staff member will be identifiable in the results. All data will be kept securely at Cardiff University.

Please remember that you can withdraw at any time up until the interview has been transcribed, which will be up to 2 weeks after the interview, and after this time your information will not be identifiable and therefore cannot be destroyed.

This research is to be used as a course requirement on the DEdPsy course at Cardiff University. The final report will be submitted to the university. The anonymised findings will also be shared with the local authority and any participants who may be interested.

Please contact myself or my supervisor if you have any concerns or questions about the research you have been a part of.

Thank you very much for your participation.

Who can I contact for further information?

Contact Details of Researcher:

Vanessa Brown, School of Psychology, Cardiff University, CUCHDS, 30 Park Place, Cardiff, CF10 3AT

Email: XXXXXXXXX

Contact Details of Research Supervisor

Andrea Higgins, School of Psychology, Cardiff University, CUCHDS, 30 Park Place, Cardiff, CF10 3AT

Email: XXXXXXXXX

Details of Cardiff University's Research Ethics Committee:

School of Psychology, Cardiff University, Tower Building, 30 Park Place, Cardiff, CF10 3AT

Email: XXXXXXXXX

Appendix K – Braun and Clarke (2020)'s six stage Thematic Analysis

Six-stage process for data engagement, coding and theme development;

Stage 1: data familiarisation and writing familiarisation notes

Stage 2: systematic data coding

Stage 3: generating initial themes from coded and collated data

Stage 4: developing and reviewing themes

Stage 5: refining, defining and naming themes

Stage 6: writing the report.

Appendix L – Example of NVivo coding

The screenshot displays the NVivo 12 Pro software interface. The main window shows a document titled "NEET Lead - P5" with the following text:

Researcher
Yeah no it does um could you just quickly run through what support a secondary people could have could access then um if they've been identified as being at risk

P5
So a lot of the partners we have come to them typical partners we have coming on to the EIT reviews are inspire to achieve so in ((LA name)) there's a youth service a youth worker linked to every secondary school um and they provide support you know around anything really quite generic support around mental health wellbeing um whether they're isolated or they're not performing well in school or whether there's anti-social behavior you know whole broad things and that's in school support um... there's a project called positive futures then which tackles more around antisocial behavior in school and out in the community and they also have kind of reintegrate young people back into school so if a young person who might be really struggling or who might be getting expelled recently or kicking off they go out one day a week or two days a week I think it might be to do with this program of positive futures education welfare service are also part of that part of our network educational psychologists families first Careers Wales um sometimes you have a 14 plus team come along social services YOS so YOS um gotta reach project quite like um some of the youth work offer but it's more so around like so anti-social behaviour again um but preventative stuff as well so if there's a few kind of early indicators that they're starting to get involved in bad behavior or anything or being disruptive in school they can have a referral to them that's a new projects that's kind of come out called Reach ((college name)) come along or were gonna start coming around cause we're starting to make um... key links in how it can be important for college to be involved in them meetings to know a little bit more about them year 11s who transition because the ((LA name))'s learning zone is the biggest um post 16 provider in the local authority... they

The interface also shows a "Files" table with the following data:

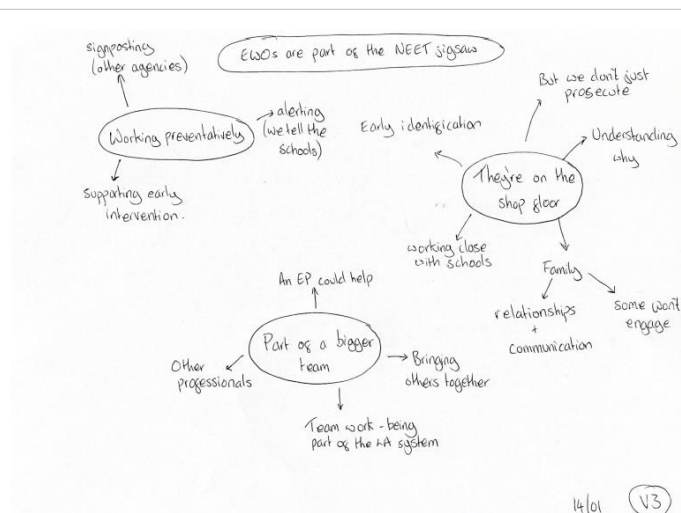
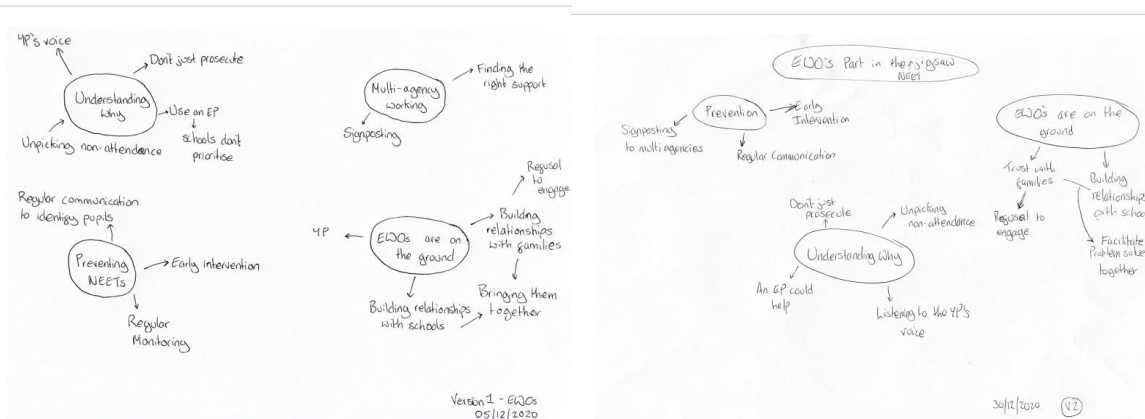
Name	Codes	References
NEET Lead - P	92	224
NEET Lead - P	90	282
NEET Lead - P	131	360
NEET Lead - P	100	263
NEET Lead - P	111	321

The right-hand pane shows a "Coding Density" chart and a legend with the following items:

- Collisions on A Risk YP
- Close reader
- Joined up working between services
- Regular communication to identify at risk pupils
- Tailored support to individual pupils needs
- At risk of becoming homeless is linked

Appendix M – Development of themes

Included is an example of the development of the EWO themes and sub-themes when conducting TA. The development, refining and defining of themes took place over time through reflective supervision sessions (Braun & Clarke, 2020).



Appendix N – Full list of search terms for the narrative literature review.

Systematic searches were performed between August and September 2020 using the following electronic databases: PsycInfo, Applied Social Science Index (ASSIA), Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC), British Education Index (BEI), Scopus and Web of Science (WoS).

The key search terms included “NEET”, “not in education”, “youth unemployment”, “transition”, “post-16”, “16-25”, “employment status”, “school to work transition”, “school dropout”, “school truancy”, “occupational guidance”, “post-school psychology” OR “career education”. These were then combined with different professional groups in an attempt to capture the multi-agency services that had relevance to this research. This included search terms to find “educational psychology” OR ‘school psychology’, “youth services”, “social services”, and “education welfare”. The table below summarises the number of results found in each electronic database. The titles and abstracts were individually reviewed to determine the relevance to this research, however due to the large number of results, not all papers were included within the narrative review.

Other appropriate literature was identified using a snowball technique through search engines such as Google Scholar and through scanning reference lists (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Additional manual searches were carried out in relevant Educational Psychology journals, for example, *Educational Psychology in Practice*. Online searches were also carried out for relevant legislation, book chapters and unpublished doctoral theses.

Electronic Database	Results
Psycinfo	684 papers
ASSIA	140 papers
Scopus	221 papers
WoS	189 papers
BEI	334 papers
ERIC	858 papers

Appendix O – Example of a section of a NEET lead participant transcript

The section included is pages 3-6 of **P4**. Full transcripts for all participants are available on request.

Researcher

Erm yeah that's really interesting um so when you're in your current role what who else supports you within the local authority to carry out your role

P4

Oo erm that's a that's an interesting one I'm almost a one person band in that I don't manage anybody directly which is a bone of contention for me because I think if I had more people if I had say two people working under me I can make an even greater impact you know but that's the way it is at the moment so erm the people I work closely with are the H plan team which has just been put together when I think you finished with us yeah the H plan team is funded by Welsh Government and focus it focuses on mitigating against youth homelessness... yeah... preventing youth homelessness so they're now my partners in crime so those four people there will work with the same young people as me erm they will support those who are most at risk of NEET in a sort of youth service way and will work hand in hand with me so they will work with those who are risk of homelessness those who are at risk of becoming NEET and they're my sort of support mechanism you can also say as well the work that anybody who will leave work and working with young people ((inaudible)) for example this was one our part of me even the Ed Psych team are you were because you were working with vulnerable people vulnerable young people who are at risk of you were a lead worker almost working on behalf of me to it to an extent you know hence the reason why I lead practitioner forums where we meet every month with lead workers to see what we're working with to see how things are going operationally you know so yeah that that's where I'm at at the moment

Researcher

Yeah erm that's yeah so it's quite diverse isn't it

P4

It is a hugely diverse I work with there's a bit of me in every department in education every part of education has a part of me in and a and a huge link of organisations outside I mean yesterday I was talking to engage to change which which I'll talk to you about it was specialism in support for autistic people for example I talk to people from CAMHS a lot doctors all sorts of people erm head teachers

erm charities you know erm youth agencies specialist people like yourself you know and they all come to me for help which is quite a privilege all these well educated people asking me for help it's fantastic ((laughs))

Researcher

((laughs))

P4

((inaudible))

Researcher

Yeah so how much of your time each week are you able to spend supporting young people who are at risk of becoming NEET is it

P4

Yeah I I don't directly do it most of the time Vanessa I'm more of erm a coordinator hence the job title you know so if I if I know a young person is being supported by someone else I'll liaise with that person and say "where are they blardy blar what do you want from me blardy blah" erm and sometimes then I will come on in the background and do a careers interview with that person and find out what they want to do and make that happen in terms of the day to day support I don't do a lot of that I'm more of a coordinator making sure that everybody's got the support they need you know

Researcher

Yeah

P4

If I was if I was sort of syphoned off to support young people that would take up too much of my time

Researcher

Yeah

P4

The coordination the whole the whole youth engagement progression framework for ((LA name))
you know

Researcher

Yeah yeah that makes sense

P4

Yeah

Researcher

Erm so if we move on to the section now about the support for young people who are either at risk
or who already are NEET

P4

Yes

Researcher

How does your local authority identify young people who are at risk of becoming or who already are
NEET

P4

Well I think I think we're very good at this erm I well I say we but the whole authority is because I
couldn't do the job without the tools they have provided so the strive system which I think we've
looked through together or you're aware of anyway aren't you obviously yeah has helped me
massively erm because we start identifying after this week young people in year 10 and to do that I I
I printed or get a report off the strive system and every young person in year 10 in a school for
example and there's a colour coding for them as you know yeah erm that that that important to take
into a meeting with the head of year a careers advisor and previously education welfare officers but
not now and we then identified as a group the ones most at risk of NEET erm and they are then
provided with a form of support the student placement at Cardiff Met for example erm visits to FE
education places you know institutions for when they leave after year 11 so when they leave erm
possible youth work support you know and then we review these young people every term then and
say "oh yeah Joe Bloggs was a red but I think he was coming in orange and he's a green now" he's
definitely got an old thing for me is destination destination destination I want them to make sure
that when September comes they going somewhere they doing something you know so I think we're

quite good at that erm I think it's improving every year Vanessa but as I said right at the start of this you need Education Welfare involved to be working together erm and I'm fri I'm not frightened I'm asking for it at the moment yeah yeah

Researcher

Yeah erm so I suppose that system then like do you feel like there's ever young people that get missed off that system

P4

I think do you know what I think during lockdown we've become even better at it *((laughs))* because I haven't been side tracked anywhere I'll be working in my conservatory or kitchen every day and speaking to every young person you wouldn't believe it you know so we've identified 331 young people in year 11 at risk of NEET erm by October 31 of this year I should in theory have found every one of them a destination they should be doing something right at the moment there are only nine only nine of them have not got a destination erm and that's because the system was working really well this year in that we managed to make contact with them and support them and they have they've been catered for that because a lot of them are wanting to speak and wanted help you know so what I want to do now is if this will become a new norm for me next year so next year I'm going to adopt like a call centre type of approach where from four o'clock in the night you know Vanessa you might actually be in the department you might want to help me you never know *((laughs))* so from four till seven next year in the evenings certainly we'll phone these kids at home and say "have you got a plan for September like what do you want to do" because that's why I'm catching in who doesn't mind catching in all the time you know so erm yeah I think I think we become a lot better now this year and I think the lockdown has been the reason for it

Appendix P – Example of a section of an EWO participant transcript

The section included is pages 3-6 of **P6**. Full transcripts for all participants are available on request.

Researcher

Um yeah so how much how many um how much time of your role is dedicated to... um supporting these young people at risk of becoming is it your is it that's the whole of your role it's not

P6

Whole of my role we I'm I cover lots of schools we work closely regular meetings with the headteachers in primary... we identify the challenging families we identify pupils that could possibly be disengaged with education and then we put in the relevant support mechanisms for these pupils so really some of these families I'm working with the children in primary school then they go up to high school so I continue to work with these families in the high school as well so each just trying to support them and make them realize how important education is and we highlight that to the parents constantly

Researcher

Yeah

P6

And um... to be honest the schools that I've worked in we don't find that we are having too many NEETs which is fantastic... you know because alternative alternative provisions are put in place so you year 11 work um proactively with um Careers Wales the colleges to find a provision when they leave year 11 to go you know post 16

Researcher

Yeah do you work with the young people just to 16 then

P6

Yeah statutory school age so education welfare we work with children from 5 to 16

Researcher

Yeah

P6

So we are within the NEET process because we try to... not allow it to get to a NEET process you know

Researcher

Yeah

P6

So we do everything we can while those children are in school and attending and make sure that they do leave with with um alternative or or with a qualification

Researcher

Yeah um definitely you spoke then about how you identify those challenging families with the schools um what kind of do you use um what kind of system do you use to identify those young people how do they become identified

P6

It's regular meetings with the heads so I have regular meetings with all my schools we will discuss children with attendance issues more often than not the head teachers will know whether there's social services involvement um you know any other underlying issues that they feel is relevant to share with myself you know there could be domestic violence within the families so I need to be aware of all this before we make home visits to the families because we're putting ourselves at risk if if we don't know the underlying issues but it's regular meetings regular communication with the primary headteachers and then in the high schools we work closely with each head of year so I would have meetings with head of year 7 8 9 10 and 11

Researcher

Okay

P6

And then we keep doing that process regularly so it's regular you know weekly *((pause))* annual um monthly meetings

Researcher

Yeah it sounds really thorough so do you ever think um young people can get missed off that system or do you feel like you can capture everyone in that

P6

Oh yeah we try and encapture and and we don't just work with children with non-attendance issues we work with children missing in education so that's the biggie at the moment um we we are finding that a lot of parents are opting to electively home educate their children which isn't ideal but some parents see that that it's more beneficial for their children and all we can do is is monitor annually and do a welfare check that's how the law states you know and if we don't feel the education is for their age ability and aptitude then we have to go down the school attendance order

Appendix Q – Example of a school staff participant transcript

The section included is pages 6-8 of **P10**. Full transcripts for all participants are available on request.

Researcher

Yeah um yeah definitely um you mentioned then how much a young person can change um... you mentioned that you have a yearly meeting is that how you monitor whether things have been successful and whether things have worked

P10

Well we have to for the local authority we have to because it because there is there is a big funding element here so... so you know technically this is funded by I'm just trying to the pupil deprivation grant um so we have to this there's quite prescriptive ways in which we have to feedback and that's changed recently but we actually still have to put a pretty detailed grant application form in and then we have to review that twice a year but thanks to our global pandemic it's only once a year at the moment um so so so so it does have to be reviewed quite quite precisely um... and you know luckily that's that's always it is always pretty easy to review that positively because if you look at you know the alternative pupils to talk about them there there's pretty stark results there but if we look at sort of like doing increased time for a group of free school meals it's pretty easy to show their that their grades are going up or their their attendance is improving or their wellbeing is improving so yeah we do I do review it pretty carefully it's a pretty big and ugly document that I've always pulled together as always but it was pretty easy to show progress which is which is which is good

Researcher

Yeah yeah so um obviously I know you said that you don't have very many pupils um have you ever so what would happen if you do have a young person that has been at one or two that are now NEET and that have dropped out what happens then

P10

So so so yeah so there's so number one that that that pupil is flagged up really really early um certainly a and we know that that I2A meeting where youth service and Careers Wales and schools all get together there there's never any surprise so that pupil is identified pretty early and yeah it was also obviously all the interventions go in and there are pupils whose challenges are are so acute that you know and like really really really really pretty majorly extreme pupil's they are out there and

there are some pupils who we certainly do know that this is going to be we are really really up against it you know and I could be talking about um... a LAC pupil who was being permanently excluded from a previous school for something to do with a knife and they come to us and we've tried to to get them engaged them in art with with us and we have some success but then that pupil then sort of retreats to you know not their care home but back to a parent and refused to get out of bed for three months and refuses to speak to anybody who sort of visits the house you know there are situations like that where where really really really our chance of exceeding success or achieving success are pretty minimal with that pupil we did um but you know it's our chance of doing that you know his challenge was so extreme really what chance have we got so we would do so all we would do for those pupils is that we would just make sure that every single external agency that we can possibly get in to add specialist help here is is in we would make sure that we we sort of never give up on that pupil in every single review meeting or meeting about pupil we're obviously attending we're obviously contributing to and to ultimately... um sort of I guess us and Careers Wales and whatever other agencies would just carry on trying but there are times when when you know either additional needs challenges are so acute or domestic breakdown is so massive that it doesn't it doesn't happen... but but that that is that is it is really really slim

Researcher

Yeah that's really helpful um one of my questions was going to be about um the uniqueness of your school and what do you feel is unique about your school that affects the support

P10

So... um on the negative the size we're massive we are we've got up to over 1800 pupils on role 150 staff on roll and we're set to get bigger um on the negative our buildings our sort of infrastructure is is appalling in places it's an embarrassment in places um we have finally got use of big amounts of money for a substantial new build which will which will be absolute transformative in that sort of that lazy group of kids who can kinda like you know semi buy into education if we had a big old glossy fancy new building that would really really really help yeah I think that the heads approach it is it is really pupil centred and it is not result centred first on first and foremost it's genuinely about providing an education for pupils and sort of caring and sort of yeah caring about pupils both their sort of their their opportunities and their wellbeing it is really about that and your that that that really does sit particularly well with our most challenged pupil's "look I don't really care what your results look like as long as we're we're able to sort of look after you and help you get to where you want to go and help you get to something that's that's going to work for you" um it's not about us

getting you know 10 A stars out of you it's not that at all or it's not about us even maximising oh okay you're supposed to get these amount of grades yeah that's that's important but that's that's not our priority our priority is looking at that pupil "okay that pupil really wants to do that what do we need to do to enable them to do that" so I think... yeah I do think the head teachers whole approach I do think is brilliant and it's been she's she's new she's two and a bit years into being our head teacher and she's using her approach has really really really resonated with the staff here and as much as as much as it ever can it's really resonated with pupil's here um so she is she's pretty amazing I will say that and if you'd do that the whole staff have kind of like really pulled behind her um so so there there is a sort of a I'd say there's a pretty a pretty good team spirit and a pretty good sort of um single minded drive to do the best for the pupils despite the fact that they might be effing and jeffing in front of you and understanding that there's a pretty sort of unique or only a pretty singular sort of desire to understand about that pupil and realise that yeah they are a pain in the backside but for every kid that's a pain in the backside there's a reason why they're a pain in the backside um so we're I think we're I think we're very patient staff I think we are really helpful staff you know not all the time obviously but I think we are yeah I think we are genuinely committed to doing the best for you know those easy kids out there but also those real pains in the backside out there

Appendix R – Example of supporting quotes for one theme and corresponding sub-themes – NEET leads

Full table of supporting quotes for all themes and sub-themes available on request.

Theme	Sub-Theme	Illustrative Quotes
<p>Are we doing a good job?</p>	<p>Being accountable</p>	<p><i>“but our our our system is really really strong it had to be about seven years ago it might even be a bit longer than that we had the worst number of NEETs in the whole of Wales obviously that put us right on the map then” P1</i></p> <p><i>“we need to talk about multiple layers and there are multiple layers to this above me is a head of service right who ultimately is responsible erm at that level for NEETs and for a myriad of different other things right that predominantly fall under me but also under another officer so this this this somebody then then there's a directory above her so so in terms of accountability we are all accountable for NEETS at multiple layers of of the Directorate erm when we are reporting to Cabinet on this agenda which we do have a report goes into scrutiny annually on NEETs” P2</i></p> <p><i>“I mean ours have been low historically the stats so you know 0.5% last June 0.7 the year before we've gone up a little bit now but erm never there's always going to be a proportion of the population in the snapshot particularly from October where they they haven't engaged or they've dropped out for provision and then we're working to get them back in” P2</i></p> <p><i>“the kind of ESF type stuff that's going on but there's erm we had our health check yesterday so our stats are kind of rigorously monitored month on month for part of the the weird region really cause it's got like ((LA name)) and ((LA name)) in it who are quite far from us geographically but nevertheless it's ((LA name)) ((LA name)) us and ((college name)) ((college name)) and ((college name)) all these different organizations erm and then each of our stats are monitored on a monthly basis looking how many engagements what the outcomes have been that that type of thing erm we then then would report that into a like a regional board which I sit on and then all the stats are cross referenced so the kinds of interventions with the young people are monitored numerically in a very sort of rigorous data form if you like and data course set” P2</i></p>

		<p><i>“I was I was quite blunt with career wales recently Vanessa right they got to understand I gotta go in front of scrutiny I gotta go in front of the board and and with these figures and and answer questions like you're asking me now right out “why you know why have X amount of kids not being engaged with what's then happened what are the measures that we're putting in place” you know when you've got that high level of accountability in local authority level you need your partners to really get it and I think probably there's a little bit of work that we could do there around them fully understanding the gravity of the situation” P2</i></p> <p><i>“our bigger priority this is NEETs is like top of our service plan high high up in terms of our erm wellbeing improvement grid that we will be erm you know that we do and and Estyn will see when they come and see you know this is high level stuff and the and the and the inspectorate will be all over us on NEETs as well as well we know so we need to make sure... primarily for our young people obviously because they are the most important thing but we need to at multiple levels make sure service deliveries right but also be able to account when when we need to we need to make sure that the the the the you know that the stats stack up and that our young people are getting the best because there will be questions if they're not and that's it that's on us” P2</i></p> <p><i>“erm there's the annual Cabinet reports that Emily will draft I then edit that then goes to Donna she looks at it with my director she looks at and then we presented to to erm scrutiny board or the council so we ultimately account to them we have to present our figures we have to present a cotton comparison with the rest of Wales in terms of the snapshot data from careers wales as well we have to talk about our programs as I'm doing now we have to say why we think that our stats are good or not so good what more we could do for our young people how we're working in a multi-agency way” P2</i></p> <p><i>“I'm making sure the strategic stuff is done and the checks and balances are in place and I'm accountable to the people I am erm and my officers know that you know they know it's me who's going to sit there in these meetings and answer the questions” P2</i></p> <p><i>“we would look with the with the post 16 stats to analyse those via the board as well so Emily brings those through so you've got the NEET's data for year 11 year 12 year 13 so again she will work with Oliver in terms of which cases are prevalent where do we need to go back to careers Wales as well where's there been non-engagement overtime and then those the kinds of checks and balances if you like sorry my phones going erm the checks and balances if you like are done at board level and through those scrutiny reports I I mentioned just to be clear the scrutiny reports ask us to highlight specific data year 11</i></p>
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		<p>year 12 year 13 when we have to go to the board” P2</p> <p>“I project develop it you know looking at reshaping or reprofiling of those targets for the local authority linked into the regional and then as part of that then my duty is to ensure that you know the quarterly monitoring and reporting of that then to the the regional partnership is is all sorted” P3</p> <p>“because obviously you know the difficulty with all of it is we all have very different KPIs and different targets to be met so you know it's quite a varied element that I manage really” P3</p> <p>“and then hopefully find them a destination ready for you know the normally the snapshot of NEETs data is taken on the 31st October so if we can get anything done before that period it's a good one for us because at least then our results don't look bad” P3</p> <p>“Yeah so we're we obviously have the IT data and then as part of ours as part of the SF funding there's there's progression on that so we have KPIs as part of that... then is obviously monitoring and tracking so attendance if they can raise by over 10% in attendance while we're working with them we can claim that as an outcome” P3</p> <p>“they're not grant funded they haven't got KPIs and quarterly monitoring that's going to be down on em like a ton of bricks if they're not doing what they're asking of them you know” P3</p> <p>“Yeah we ultimately it's when they move out of the tier so you've got tier one and two if they move to tier four and five then that is your measurement you know particularly tier five because tier five is the best one you know so that's what you're measured by and like I can draw a report then off careers Wales I can see how many NEETs we've got erm and we know that if we move erm somebody into a career then we can take them off the list you know that that is that is an indication that the systems worked well you know” P4</p> <p>“same for inspire to work again ESF funded so they work in the same way it's just more so around um... unemployment I say um so you've got the distance travelled between the two before the start and the end um ((pause)) for you we do use statistics as well then of how many young people there are um NEET so the destination data I don't know if you've heard that word being thrown around yet destination data is always a key indicator and that's what a lot of local authorities focus on” P4</p>
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		<p><i>"I think last year they were ten young people who were deemed as NEET um and that was between Tier 2 and Tier 3 um and I think the year before I think it was nine so they're really low figures really but that's one of the... um indicators of how... the systems are working and how the services are implementing the support because the numbers of those actually NEET are getting lower and lower... and on top of that then we have monthly breakdowns then of all the tiers in the local authority showing you know where everybody is so again you can see that kind of development there" P4</i></p> <p><i>"There's a screenshot of all the year 11 leavers and how they progressed into education employment or training so it's broken down at the tier one tier two tier 3 4 5 um and the local authorities held accountable for the tier twos and the tier threes..." P5</i></p> <p><i>"Yeah so... with the pre 16 stuff um for instance the inspire to achieve programme because their ESF funded there's they're very strict in what they've gotta to do like the paperwork wise" P5</i></p> <p><i>"everybody's bread and butter I suppose across local authorities and for EPC's cause that's their focus as well it's keeping them numbers down" P5</i></p>
	<p>But it's just a snapshot</p>	<p><i>"then obviously for the year 11 12 and 13 it's all about the data for the 31st October..." P1</i></p> <p><i>"so as soon as something happens so say for example a young person is in education on the 31st October and they don't class as NEET say then they drop out of school after Christmas the school will then inform us they then go into either tier two or three so they're offered the support then" P1</i></p> <p><i>"the figures yeah because even though they are a snapshot of the day I know what work goes in behind the figures so whereas other people are proud of the figures because we look so low I'm proud of the figures because I know the work that's been done with the young people and as much as I have to it's difficult for me because I'm in the middle so I'm in the middle between the people who want to know about the figures and then the people who really really care deeply" P1</i></p> <p><i>"I would change how it's recorded to Welsh government I have got an issue with that because they just effectively the whole kind of snapshot of whether a young person is sustained provision beyond year 11 if you like is just one snapshot that's taken on the 31st October once they're into year 12 and I wonder about that but I just think that that's just one day of the year do you know what I mean I know you have to take there has to be some way of of measuring but I wonder whether that's the most comprehensive</i></p>

		<p>system in the world just to say “right careers wales on this date are these kids... you know gainfully engaged or not” I I think that maybe needs looking at” P2</p> <p>“we had great results and we said “ahh look you know from careers worker we had the information there’s no there’s no no NEET we’re great” erm however a week before then the snapshot was taken careers decided to ring a lot of learners who said then “oh no we haven’t started with ACT yet or we haven’t started with this provider” so I think this year now we made all these changes where ACT now their their admission and start date is before the snapshot before the half term” P3</p> <p>“but on top of that because we cause that date cause that tool is only run twice a year in October and February ((coughs)) it’s only a snapshot of the time that is done so we know like circumstances can change so they can get excluded three days after that tool in our data is taken” P5</p> <p>“Yeah but it it says that yeah it does say that but that's only year 11 leavers then... so that doesn't look at anything past that I suppose” P5</p> <p>“but the downside to that is then that that data being so late in the year is local authorities got to the 31st of October to find provisions for them young people and we don't get that information sometimes until mid October last last year we got it mid October we’ve got about two weeks to find places these young people before the destination figures were um cut off so going back to time that’s not you know that's not very good that's not that doesn't support the work we do but equally it's hard for ((college name)) to get that well all colleges to get that data over at the right time because it takes that 6 six week period to get um an idea of whose started and whose enrolled really so... that’s one of the short falls of the system I suppose” P5</p>
	<p>Current funding arrangements don't make it easy</p>	<p>“you know we are we are bound because we are part of a EPF program right with I2A I2W Vanessa you know within parameters within which will give you the money and we we'd like to just be given money to get on and do you know as we see fit because I've got such faith in Henry and Oliver and they know their clients they know they know what they need to do okay but but it's like any you know any any grant funding an idea ((inaudible)) has been grant funded for years now it's it's like a game isn't it there are parameters to it and you can you can move your your pieces within those given parameters it is like a joint chess board you can't go outside of them if you go outside of them you don't get your grant funding so you have to temper your erm your aspiration's and your creativity to a degree because you want you you can't function without the money erm it's just it's a simple it's a simple equation you need the money</p>

	<p><i>and you have to abide by other protocols that are outlined” P2</i></p> <p><i>“I think if we if we added like carte Blanche yeah well we would do things like ever so slight you know we would pull resource into certain areas and we would you know we would we would be very creative around staffing in a way that potentially we're a little bit more bound by” P2</i></p> <p><i>“but erm I I think if I'm honest with you given the nature of how the funding is presented we do a really great job with it in terms of the I2A I2W basically we really do we maximize that particularly I2W I think our region if we weren't performing to the level we were our regional stats would be really struggling and I don't think we'd be engaging with a number of young people we were unless we were working in the way we are so I think given with the parameters we operate in we're doing very well” P2</i></p> <p><i>“Massively I know we're going to look for the we're going to look to reprofile currently to take on an extra 80 clients erm going forward so you know for us it means quite a lot of figures but potentially then it's it's also something like an extra 200,000 pounds that we'll draw down just to be able to do that so for us at least then we know that we've got enough money for clients to have training to have what they need whereas at the moment we're kind of going there's no money I've got a you know I do have to search in my other pots of finances from homelessness and others to try and make a bit of money at the moment just to support them” P3</i></p> <p><i>“you know she she does our EOTAS contracts brokerage which again is good because she then knows you know how many NEET young people may benefit from whatever erm EOTAS type provision we we we can we can commission but again that takes time because it's a legal agreement they're not put together overnight erm ideally if I had an endless resource you know I'd have some one person focused on the brokerage one person focused on but yeah if I had endless amounts of money yeah that's what I would do but I haven't got that so again it's about utilizing the time and resource as best we can” P3</i></p> <p><i>“any young person coming towards panel or they're the top end and effectively as soon as you pick up that kid and start working with em you're almost assigned to 18 months of one to one support which is quite quite a challenge then for some of these you know especially if they're grant funded or you know KPIs and and that are such that you know you have to keep turning over numbers and have to keep you know giving them an out and a strategy so it's a difficult one really to to pin it all together sometimes” P3</i></p> <p><i>“So you know for us we're about 40,000 shy at the moment so but at the same time if there's a client who's got a job and they only need 1000 pounds to put on X Y and Z “there's 1000 pound let's get them</i></p>
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		<p><i>in" you know so it's I've taken a bit of a different approach to other local authorities but it speaks volumes when we're already you know we've completed the project we could sit down for the next two years if we wanted you know and not have any repercussions for it so it's works for us you know" P3</i></p> <p><i>"but quite often its more you know because the targets are set so high you know we have to try and engage them in a group first unfortunately you know because if if we spend too much time on 1:1s then we don't hit the targets and we get we get penalised then as part of the funders so you know quite often what we tend to do is try the groups first and then we build capacity then so say you know "okay you can have your own 1:1 lessons or bespoke"" P3</i></p> <p><i>"for the likes of inspire to achieve and the likes of ESF projects there's always a criteria for what a young person needs or they gotta meet um you know certain areas or you know projects set so much of our criteria or funding set so much of a criteria that it does leave gaps so that's one of the teams that we depend on then to kind of pick them young people up then it's the more disengaged and the most furthest away" P5</i></p>
	<p>Challenges of a pandemic</p>	<p><i>"I don't work one to one with young people I actually am at the moment over the phone with that I have a small caseload at the moment due to COVID... we try normally to start our home visits now but we can't at the moment" P1</i></p> <p><i>"they're ignoring careers advisors especially at the moment" P1</i></p> <p><i>"but then at the moment we've also got to be careful because we haven't got as much to offer the youth workers can't put them in their car and take them to college to visit can't take them to the amount of times I've put a young person in my car with another worker and taken them to careers wales myself but we can't do that at the moment" P1</i></p> <p><i>"covid is a massive risk I can't say that it isn't it's huge what you've got now with like a good few months of kids not been in school providers haven't been in so things like that you know there's a lot of lot of discussion around erm how we are we negotiate some of these challenges" P2</i></p> <p><i>"we can't say that we can say well it was difficult Covid was difficult yeah alright covid was difficult well you know the question then comes so what are you doing well how are you mitigating against that" P2</i></p>

		<p><i>“others are going on to training apprenticeships you know we've still got work placements taking place where possible and safe to do so because of COVID” P3</i></p> <p><i>“Yeah I think you know they you know careers have obviously stepped their game up obviously since covid” P3</i></p> <p><i>“you know NEETs figures will go up and effectively this year because of COVID etc NEET figures will rise across the board” P3</i></p> <p><i>“I think do you know what I think during lockdown we've become even better at it ((laughs)) because I haven't been side tracked anywhere” P4</i></p> <p><i>“so from four till seven next year in the evenings certainly we'll phone these kids at home and say “have you got a plan for September like what do you want to do” because that's why I'm catching in who doesn't mind catching in all the time you know so erm yeah I think I think we become a lot better now this year and I think the lockdown has been the reason for it” P4</i></p> <p><i>“young people naturally won't want to progress into anything at the moment and it's the same with schools isn't it there's some young people who aren't returning back to school um because of things like health or they might be shielding” P5</i></p> <p><i>“Given they've got mitigating circumstances... so you know young people might make their own decisions once they've left school to not enter into something until things settle” P5</i></p> <p><i>“Youth unemployment is on the up job opportunities are massively decreasing um and young people between the ages of 16 to 24 are the ones impacted most at the moment by Covid for jobs so that goes hand in hand with homelessness then people losing their tenancies um... and obviously losing their wages” P5</i></p> <p><i>“because services are operating differently now so whereas normally um our lead workers for post 16 for the tier 1 and tier 2 um only one service is going out and doing it so the other services you know are tied and they haven't been authorized to go out so you know where where needed I do do that face to face stuff as well then” P5</i></p> <p><i>“I mean we've tried we've being active like we don't we've worked all the way through and continue</i></p>
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		<p><i>working but um it's good now that we're at that point now we've gone back out and door knocking and and trying to contact them um and there's been constant work reaching out to the young people throughout um contacting them through phone WhatsApp email so it it's been ongoing but it still needs that face to face stuff as well then dunnit" P5</i></p> <p><i>"there's been times like this year that's been difficult obviously because there's been you know a lot of assemblies missed there's been a lot of um open days that haven't been able to operate um but there's there's been some positive work there" P5</i></p>
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Appendix S – Example of supporting quotes for one theme and corresponding subthemes – EWOs

Full table of supporting quotes for all themes and sub-themes available on request.

Theme	Sub-Theme	Illustrative Quotes
<p>We're on the shop floor</p>	<p>Family</p>	<p>Sub-sub theme – Relationships and communication</p> <p><i>“some of these families I'm working with the children in primary school then they go up to high school so I continue to work with these families in the high school as well so each just trying to support them and make them realize how important education is and we highlight that to the parents constantly” P6</i></p> <p><i>“they're very very different let's say you'll go there and somebody might welcome you with open arms or they'll start shouting at you and I'm like “please don't shoot the messenger I just want to make sure your child's okay” and it's just trying to win that family over and say “look we're just doing our job and we want to see your child get an education let's let's work together” you know and... during lockdown I've sent letters to parents and they've never ever met me whereas now they've spoken on the phone it's it's really broken the ice with them and they're seeing that I'm a normal person and not a monster you know” P6</i></p> <p><i>“we have it on occasions but it's amazing because I've worked with these families over the years that you know I may have prosecuted parents but they we're still on speaking terms because they understand that I don't make the rules I have to do my job” P6</i></p> <p><i>“you've really got to be... a people person you know I suppose we're a bit like hairdressers they confide in you the parents you know and you gotta get them onside to move forward” P6</i></p> <p><i>“communication is key with all of them it's keeping the lines of communication open and... you know all through lockdown we we've spoken to the parents” P6</i></p>

		<p><i>"I do receive feedback from parents "thanks for your support thank you for getting so and so on board because they've really supported my son or my daughter" so yeah there's some good outcomes" P6</i></p> <p><i>"So you give them the opportunities and every home visit is different you might do a home visit and then you've got to get the child protection team out it it's... because we're on the shop floor seeing how the families live" P6</i></p> <p>Sub-sub theme – Some won't engage</p> <p><i>"you have to deal with it effectively whatever comes your way you know and use a different approach with families like that" P6</i></p> <p><i>"it's just about offering support or some of the things we've introduced is like um educational neglect that we've set up with social services cause quite often we were finding the children weren't in school parents weren't engaging" P7</i></p> <p><i>"some parents they've got the right not to even allow us into their home" P6</i></p> <p><i>"So it's very difficult to sometimes undertake a welfare check... and look at their work you know because if they don't want to let us through the door they won't sadly" P6</i></p> <p><i>"but we try and get there's not many of them I have to say but you might get the odd one or two you know and we just we just tell the parents we've got your child's best interests at heart we just want to know they're well you know if they don't let me through them me through the door I speak to the child on the phone so I know they're okay" P6</i></p> <p><i>"Oh the biggest challenges are the families that aren't willing to engage with you" P6</i></p> <p><i>"you just try and work with these families but sadly you've got some parents that just you just don't want to engage and the ones that don't engage are the ones that we have to go down the legal procedure with" P6</i></p> <p><i>"you know you have some families Vanessa that we that have been prosecuted four times you</i></p>
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		<p><i>know and sadly all we're trying to do is invoke a change and sometimes it doesn't" P6</i></p> <p><i>"it's just constantly highlighting that you know every child has a right to education... you know and it is a form of neglect if it if a parent isn't attempting and trying their best to get their child to to engage with with the school life" P6</i></p> <p><i>"Yes and obviously what they will agree to really cause it could say "just go away I don't want any support and I ain't coming to school" and that's tough you know but we try our best" P7</i></p> <p><i>"if we've got a child that's not engaging and a parent not engaging and attending in school then obviously we do the home visits" P6</i></p>
	<p>Listening to the YP's voice</p>	<p><i>"so pupil voice is very important and the head of house or head of year not the head of years as in the teachers but the heads in the with the pupils and they've got like councils that they'll talk to "well do you fancy this or what you fan"" P6</i></p> <p><i>"yeah so... you know it's that pupils wishes and feelings and you know they they they might do a questionnaire in school what they want so they children have a view these days and their views are listened they've got a pupil voice" P6</i></p> <p><i>"you have to try and understand the views of the pupil" P6</i></p> <p><i>"as you get to know the children the what their barriers are and how you can support them better" P7</i></p>
	<p>Working closely with schools</p>	<p><i>"we work closely with the schools monitoring attendance" P6</i></p> <p><i>"You know and I I work closely with head of year elevens as well" P6</i></p> <p><i>"Whole of my role we I'm I cover lots of schools we work closely regular meetings with the headteachers in primary" P6</i></p> <p><i>"it's regular meetings regular communication with the primary headteachers and then in the</i></p>

		<p><i>high schools we work closely with each head of year so I would have meetings with head of year 7 8 9 10 and 11” P6</i></p> <p><i>“we all work very closely together the communication is amazing you know and if it if Billy is not in school for example or Joe Bloggs schools will let let us know... and then we can see we have meetings and we'll... um look at the attendance if there's an improvement we're doing cartwheels if there's a decline then we look at the next step” P6</i></p> <p><i>“well the senior leadership team keep a close a close eye and if they feel that um they've got to intervene and see why the schools attendance isn't as it should be then obviously that's addressed with the individual schools so it's keeping tabs on everything to make the world go round and ensure that every every child receives an education” P6</i></p> <p><i>“I've been dealing with um children where they've got additional learning needs ones presenting in behaviour well both most presenting behaviour ones a dyslexic pupil and mom's coming to us with school just sending em home and things like that so now it's about challenging the school and things like that to say “well actually it's additional learning needs are you following this this is you know is there a one page profile in place” you know and it's just making sure schools are accountable for what's in place” P7</i></p> <p><i>“It's regular meetings with the heads so I have regular meetings with all my schools we will discuss children with attendance issues” P6</i></p> <p><i>“I think their wellbeing is paramount and you want to see them enjoying and fulfilling an education you know you want to you want to see them smiling in the corridors” P6</i></p>
	<p>Understanding why</p>	<p><i>“it's quite useful really when it comes to recognizing children and having that holistic picture of em because you quite often well oh well they'll discuss so and so with the families you tend to get a good picture” P7</i></p> <p><i>“Yeah we'll we go out and speak to the family um or the children see where the barriers are to them attending school” P7</i></p>

	<p><i>“you have to try and understand the views of the pupil understand with the parents why they're having issues getting them into school” P6</i></p> <p><i>“children where they've got additional learning needs ones presenting in behaviour well both most presenting behaviour ones a dyslexic pupil and mom's coming to us with school just sending em home and things like that so now it's about challenging the school and things like that to say “well actually it's additional learning needs are you following this this is you know is there a one page profile in place”” P7</i></p> <p><i>“it's historical you'll you'll find that parents didn't go to school they'll have children and then we're working with those children of those parents that didn't go to sch go to school and it's historical and I you know I've been doing this for a long time now and I'm working with the parents who were the children they weren't going to the school” P6</i></p> <p><i>“it could be children's perception of bullying so it could be “right obviously we need to do a piece of work around that so it's best to look at that bullying”” P7</i></p> <p><i>“you know that each case is different and we identify the difference and what best approach to use” P6</i></p> <p><i>“we're a universal service so obviously we know obviously their needs might be different the conversations we might have are different” P7</i></p> <p><i>“if parents are saying it's mental health issues then they then go to the doctor and then that goes to mental health and more often than not parents will provide us with medical documentation stating that the GP doesn't doesn't think their child is fit for school depending on what reason that is you know...” P6</i></p> <p><i>“we identify that we find out why the child's not attending and then we can put the necessary processes in place to stop these these pupils from becoming NEET” P6</i></p> <p><i>“so there's so many different layers within school why a child might not be attending” P6</i></p> <p><i>“they've got to look at the the dynamics of the city and then put these in you know implement</i></p>
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		<p><i>the support that they feel is vital to the geographics really you know I look at ((LA name)) and the other authority I worked for and they're so different you've got sleepy villages in one and then you've got a city with another one so you're up against different issues" P6</i></p> <p><i>"this is such a much more built up area in the city and it was different issues that I would be dealing with in another in another authority for example uh a lot of farms and they're like "oh I'm not gonna send Billy to school because he knows the difference between a cow and a pig what does he need education for he's gonna continue running the farm" so there are different issues you know" P6</i></p> <p><i>"if they've missed out you know a couple of weeks and it thrown their routine and they like routine especially you know on ASD pupils they like that" P6</i></p> <p><i>"then obviously you got other things like family influences" P7</i></p> <p><i>"but it could be drugs and alcohol" P7</i></p> <p><i>"they may not be able to attend school or further education such as mental health issues pregnancy things like that or they or they're just not ready..." P7</i></p> <p><i>"there could be domestic violence within the families so I need to be aware of all this before we make home visits to the families because we're putting ourselves at risk if if we don't know the underlying issues" P6</i></p> <p><i>"it could be for a number of of reasons we're finding mental health is prevalent at the moment" P6</i></p> <p><i>"it depends on what their statement is what their you know their statutory assessment is and you know we still try and ensure that they are in school and it might be a different approach with them but we work with all pupils whether they're ethnic minority SEN to find out... you know what the barrier is why they're not attending school" P6</i></p> <p><i>"I think so as you get to know the children the what their barriers are and how you can support them better" P7</i></p>
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	<p>But we don't just prosecute</p>	<p><i>"there's so much in our remit is not just non-school attendance child missing in education you know so we do as much as we can to try and get these families to engage" P6</i></p> <p><i>"we do do a lot of either referrals to social services it's not that that's our welfare part you know we do we do the welfare bit and then we do the attendance" P6</i></p> <p><i>"the ones that we have to go down the legal procedure with but that is like the last... the last um nail in the coffin we try to do everything we can before it does go to prosecution" P6</i></p> <p><i>"Yeah absolutely it's not just EWS prosecuting it's us linking up with other professionals to prevent this" P6</i></p> <p><i>"intervention working with all the multi agencies to try to stop prosecution from from happening" P6</i></p> <p><i>"in the past they've always been prosecute prosecute prosecute for those who don't engage with us but now it's about seeing what else is out there or supportive agencies to work with the children" P7</i></p> <p><i>"all we can do is is monitor annually and do a welfare check that's how the law states you know and if we don't feel the education is for their age ability and aptitude then we have to go down the school attendance order" P6</i></p> <p><i>"you know you have some families Vanessa that we that have been prosecuted four times you know and sadly all we're trying to do is invoke a change and sometimes it doesn't" P6</i></p> <p><i>"say look "you know I've spoken to you a couple of times I've done a home visit... now this is up to you otherwise you know we've gotta play hardball"" P6</i></p>
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Appendix T – Example of supporting quotes for one theme and corresponding subthemes – School Staff

Full table of supporting quotes for all themes and sub-themes available on request.

Theme	Sub-Theme	Illustrative Quotes
<p>Treating YP as individuals</p>	<p>Genuine care</p>	<p><i>“the idea is that the the head of year will know the child... and then they will take all of the information from all of the subject areas and they will then use all of that information to sort of evolve what they do with each child” P8</i></p> <p><i>“our heads of years are experts in that actually they're very very good and there are certain personalities drawn to that role and they tend to do that with real ambition and energy” P8</i></p> <p><i>“which doesn’t really match the the genuine care and hard work that that goes in” P10</i></p> <p><i>“I mean we work we all work incredibly hard and sort of you know we are genuinely nice guys trying to do our best for kids” P10</i></p> <p><i>“but we have to because we have so many pupils who have boundaries and battles in their way in order to get there in order to the 10 or the 8 or 7 we have to be aware of their boundaries and battles so that we can help them with them” P8</i></p> <p><i>“it is held up as being you know like good to excellent so there is a confidence that we have in knowing our children in this school specifically” P8</i></p> <p><i>“so we instantly try and... reach out and get as much information as possible for each and every one of those children so I'm pretty confident in what we do and how we know our kids um I can't tell you whether that is something that is um... something that is done in every school I would say that actually we're probably in a position of strength there” P8</i></p> <p><i>“it needs to be stressed that you know these are pupils and families with huge amount of challenge so</i></p>

		<p><i>yeah we I've got a wonderful member of staff who sort of sits right on top of that and does all that day to day problem troubleshooting sort of manoeuvring massaging sort of smoothing out um that's a with with a with a relatively small group of pupils maybe I don't know maybe 10 pupils um that that can that can be pretty exhaustive" P10</i></p> <p><i>"I'd say there's a pretty a pretty good team spirit and a pretty good sort of um single minded drive to do the best for the pupils despite the fact that they might be effing and jeffing in front of you and understanding that there's a pretty sort of unique or only a pretty singular sort of desire to understand about that pupil and realise that yeah they are a pain in the backside but for every kid that's a pain in the backside there's a reason why they're a pain in the backside um so we're I think we're I think we're very patient staff I think we are really helpful staff you know not all the time obviously but I think we are yeah I think we are genuinely committed to doing the best for you know those easy kids out there but also those real pains in the backside out there" P10</i></p> <p><i>it's genuinely about providing an education for pupils and sort of caring and sort of yeah caring about pupils both their sort of their their opportunities and their wellbeing it is really about that and your that that that really does sit particularly well with our most challenged pupil's "look I don't really care what your results look like as long as we're we're able to sort of look after you and help you get to where you want to go and help you get to something that's that's going to work for you" P10</i></p> <p><i>"Yeah it was a cot death and she... she's got um she's not she's on the ASD herself and she'd already signed up for college... I'm still in touch with her just to see how she's getting on because she's somebody that I got close to I got close to the family I'd been to the funeral I'd supported through the pregnancy and out to the other side so in instances like that when you've built up a good rapport with the family you do tend to stay with them for a little while" P9</i></p> <p><i>"we absolutely still take ownership of those pupils they are still very much connected with the school they still physically come into school one day a week and we have a member of staff who is dedicated to physically connecting them with the school on a daily basis if that needs be" P10</i></p>
	<p>Listening to YP</p>	<p><i>"it is really pupil centred and it is not result centred first" P10</i></p> <p><i>"it's not about us getting you know 10 A stars out of you it's not that at all or it's not about us even</i></p>

		<p><i>maximising oh okay you're supposed to get these amount of grades yeah that's that's important but that's that's not our priority our priority is looking at that pupil "okay that pupil really wants to do that what do we need to do to enable them to do that"" P10</i></p> <p><i>"you know red amber or greening their choices based on what the teachers think before we sit back down with the pupils and say "right these are your A Level choices these aren't necessarily great"" P8</i></p> <p><i>"we're going through every single kids choices options destinations and and engaging with them even sitting with them when they do the interviews on the phone" P8</i></p> <p><i>"there's a lot of sort of one on one individual support from within the sixth form team to sort of to to work out "what do we do now what is the best path pathway what are your options"" P10</i></p> <p><i>"When I started working it was the youngsters had no vision for the future they came from third generation unemployed and they didn't see anything for themselves but over the 15 years that has totally turned around and the majority see themselves going to college going to training providers more recently getting apprenticeships or working they actually do have visions for themselves" P9</i></p> <p><i>"we're talking through that so they're talking about things that are going on in their life they're talking about their aspirations they're talking about their boyfriends or their girlfriends or just it's quite informal like I keep copious notes to be perfectly honest for myself but all the meetings are informal..." P9</i></p> <p><i>"if they come in for their results which the majority do I'll see that then and we'll have a catch up" P9</i></p> <p><i>"I think you know whether that is sitting and having a cup of tea for seven minutes every day to breakdown the negative neurons or whatever they're called that go into the brain it is almost like a horses for courses affair" P8</i></p> <p><i>"There's no point continuing to do stuff if it's not having the impact and that can be through peer that could be through like pupil voice it could be through just engagement you know with them in a coaching and mentoring capacity" P8</i></p> <p><i>"it's basically working with them and finding out what they're interested in the majority have no idea what they want to do some of them on the flippant side they say all "I'm just going to be a drug</i></p>
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		<p>dealer” so we go into all the options of being a drug dealer how that that's going to benefit them not benefit them and just try and get them engaged in something” P9</p>
	<p>Building YP’s resilience</p>	<p>“we also we try and build up their strength so that actually academically they feel strong enough to go to a college and be at the top of one group of pupils rather than be at the bottom of a sixth form group of pupils so again that conversation happens with these registered pupils because it has to happen” P8</p> <p>“you can sort of take your own if I showed you a photograph of that pupil before and that pupil afterwards the difference in their confidence and their self-esteem is like it’s like night and day difference” P10</p> <p>“I’ll pick those up in year 11 as I said as one to one or if they need more... some just need a bit of encouragement and somebody to say “yeah that's a good idea you can do that” just somebody to believe in them” P9</p> <p>“so whether that is again um whether that is interventions whether that is esteem building” P8</p>
	<p>Getting the pathway right</p>	<p>“the more I do this the more I think that actually the the absolute key function of this latter stage of school is setting yourself up with a pathway that is going to work for you um and that is all about preventing preventing being a NEET which is kind of worst case scenario at the end of year 11 so... yeah the more you think about it the more actually the off your whole your whole approach and so that that whole kind of ethos I try to instil in year 10 and year 11 it's all about getting on the right pathway which of course is all about ensuring not being NEET” P10</p> <p>“all of those things that we can stick our fingers in to try and find out what makes a child tick” P8</p> <p>“we’ve done quite a sort of we’re had quite a change of our of our whole target setting procedures now right the way back into the start of year 7 and it sounds it's something that can sound sort of if I sell this badly it can sound quite negative so based on on pupil's year 6 data as soon as they land with us we will band them into ABCD band pupils and we will sort of set sort of your very very generic targets really for an A band pupil we’ll make it really clear we are expecting this range of outcomes and if your son or daughter was A band pupil you know that's that's a bit of a pat on the back we're</p>

	<p>saying “this is a bright kid we're expecting this” though the one that's difficult or the group that's difficult to sell is the D band pupil and where where we're saying “look in all honesty based on Key Stage two outcomes we're expecting you know let's say a maximum of D grades” but then we sort of but so as far as that can be if we sell that sell that wrong that that's quite a sort of a negative quite a sort of restrictive assumption but we are mindful that we will work with a you know a huge range of kids ability wise and then what we would do is for that band that D band pupil we would sort of set about you know choosing clever qualifications and clever options and all the right sort of qualifications the right courses the right pathways so that by the end of the year 8 that pupil has already exceeded that sort of that minimum requirement and we sell it very much as a “this is this is kind of like our minimum sort of targets or our minimum thought and we set about exceeding that” but that obviously by identifying those pupils in year 7 really sort of focuses or gives us much more time to sort of get those pathways and those courses right so by the end of the year by the end of the year 11 um again the risk of that pupil being a NEET is substantially reduced because they've already bagged I don't know maybe five B equivalents from from from different from level two options so yep a range of things which I guess sort of doesn't always feel NEET focused and is not entirely NEET focused but a range of things which mean that actually when it comes to that sort of that transition at the end of year 11 year 12 or 13 we're dealing with a real minority of pupils” P10</p> <p>“we're immensely proud actually of the results that they get compared to the results they would have got and then I guess the most impressive thing about that that move to an alternative provision is is almost you know without exception 100% by the end of that alternative provision 100% of those pupils will have a really secure pathway mapped out for post 16 which actually wouldn't have happened beforehand so straight away with perhaps that most vulnerable group of pupils that most obvious potential NEET cohort um by doing that we've reduced the sort of the actual NEET percentage by you know to zero... um we're and we're sort of we were sort of well we were we're very very much aware though of the importance of getting those alternative pupils on the right pathway” P10</p> <p>“we're battling with a couple of pupils with sort of an accute sort of attendance blocks to school that have either either be been with us for a couple years now or they've recently joined from other schools and you know our our starting point is that with their timetable with the challenges that they've faced our starting point is that we can do whatever you want with their timetable to try and re-engage and re-engage them in their learning and then once if we managed to do that we can kind of do whatever we want with that time to at the moment to try and sort of focus on the functionality of what year 11</p>
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		<p><i>is” P10</i></p> <p><i>“so what our plan is we always try and get as many of our kids the 10 level twos but if they can't access Level 2 or for for 10 we'll shift them around a bit so we'll have a couple doing a level one like a an entry level qualification and then again we just try and mix mix up curriculum offers to suit pupils so they leave with whatever they can leave with now obviously as you go down the spectrum... that that offer reduces depending on how many barriers the children have got in their way” P8</i></p> <p><i>“We're also aware that each individual child has different challenges and sometimes whether it's a behavioural need whether it's a social need from outside um or whether it's a learning need that stops them possibly from getting 10 so we look at making sure that they get whatever they can in the confines of the building and try and get them that and what we do is we try and identify them early we then work on alternative qualifications um we work on qualifications which are little bit more attainable so we run entry level qualification alongside GCSE and we also timetable so that sometimes for instance in the past couple of years we've had people that go out on work experience and then they come in for say 4 mornings a week um so they'll get something which means they can make the next step now what that means is that we have reduced our NEETs” P8</i></p> <p><i>“we've got a really great you know that I can't speak highly enough about our head and sort of her whole approach and her approach ethos her whole ethos kind of really is in tune with that and she's bold and she's daring and she's brave and all that sort of stuff and she's wonderfully supportive so you know there's there's often such a sensible case for doing something completely different for a pupil” P10</i></p> <p><i>“we're a big comprehensive school and we're sort of flexible and all the rest of it but we're acutely aware that our what provision we can offer isn't best for some pupils so we work really hard on identifying which pupils in year 10 and 11 who would would really benefit from a radically alternative provision and we yeah we um we crudely sort of farm out a group of pupils each year to to various alternative provisions...” P10</i></p> <p><i>“when you get to sort of the extreme end of the spectrum because the alternative is is pretty damning for for a pupil um to sort of like to plough them with something that hasn't clearly worked for if if we're talking about a pupil with sort of acute um blocks about coming into school who hasn't attended</i></p>
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		<p>school for a couple of years um we've got a choice haven't we we can either blindly plod on doing kind of what the majority majority of pupils do knowing that is not the diet that pupils needed in fact that's a diet that's caused quite a sort of an adverse reaction from that pupil um and because it was with that sort of people we are starting really from a no chance of success almost and no engagement in learning therefore if we can get you know one hour a week of something useful that is progress now that's not the that's nowhere near the sort of stipulated you know your pupil of key stage 4 must have this amount of lessons but we're starting from a pretty desperate place and there are there are many many kids with vulnerabilities vulnerabilities and challenges that put them in that pretty desperate place" P10</p> <p>"we try and be as creative as we absolutely can be in as flexible as we can be and as bold as we can be in chopping and changing and doing whatever we would need to do to to A sort of really clearly identify what is the likely pathway and B to to really as much as we can ensure that pupil has the support they need to overcome the challenges that they've no doubt got in front of them to actually get the whatever it is the five D's or the five B's or the five C's whatever it is to sort of progress onto that pathway and you know we are prepared to be pretty ruthless about that and we are prepared to sort of like tear up the standard issue timetable and make it look really really different because like I said I do have this sort of this this quite strong belief that in year 11 our main function is not to have you know great fun filled lessons it's actually to functionally enable that pupil to progress on so..." P10</p> <p>"these people who come from a desperately desperate looking place in school like you know crudley the most often the most nightmare challenging schools who react so sort of like violently extremely against the sit against a big sort of comprehensive school that doesn't work for them they are a path to going nowhere and if you get them on that right alternative pathway um almost without exception or actually completely without exception for the last couple of years that pupil has just been transformed by that pathway" P10</p> <p>"I've never ever had a kickback for how you know for exactly how many pupils can I put on the alternative pathway programme um how much it's going to cost I never really get a challenge for that because it's seen as absolutely essential and absolutely transformative for that pupil um" P10</p> <p>"because it's so obviously you take something that is broken and you know you get the right pathway</p>
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		<p><i>in there and you mend it and the differences it's the most it's the most visible difference you'll see in a secondary school and like I said for the mundane lazy kids um yeah of course there's a difference you can see difference but for this group the differences it's never more visible" P10</i></p> <p><i>"you know luckily that's that's always it is always pretty easy to review that positively because if you look at you know the alternative pupils to talk about them there there's pretty stark results there" P10</i></p> <p><i>"but we always get the results from it and we and we have you know there's there are great really great providers out there um who can for that pupil do so much better at the job so much of a better job than us with our systems and financial and time limitations so there are are great providers out there" P10</i></p> <p><i>"we have to continue to review where where provision is best placed to come in from and like I said before we would definitely up for engineering a change in provision if we think that's going to get a better outcome" P10</i></p> <p><i>"by identifying those pupils in year 7 really sort of focuses or gives us much more time to sort of get those pathways and those courses right so by the end of the year by the end of the year 11 um again the risk of that pupil being a NEET is substantially reduced" P10</i></p> <p><i>"so even though we're putting all of those traditional things and we're trying to find new innovative ways to engage pupils we're finding all the time "ah look there's a we can pay for um training to to deliver our own equality and diversity GCSE" and yeah and we can do that" P8</i></p>
	<p>ALN pupils bring different challenges</p>	<p><i>"ALN would do their own thing in sort of and again we are they are they they've got scope to be sort of brave and bold in the same way that I have and they will be sort of that they will really chop and change timetables and provision as best suits a particular pupil" P10</i></p> <p><i>"we'll right right from early on we'll try and work out "okay that pupil there yeah they've got I've got a few challenges there I think I think ALN is the clear sort of support mechanism there for that pupil there yeah actually I think it's probably that that their head a year or director of wellbeing" as we call them now that that that so we identify the challenges and we try and match up the where the where best the provision is going to come from" P10</i></p>

		<p><i>"I haven't mentioned this but there's obviously a lot of our vulnerability is attached to additional needs so there is there's obviously close linking with the ALN department... absolutely calling in on their support and their expertise and for a particular group of pupils you know they will really sort of tell we will sort of like divide the ownership of these pupils and there's definitely some that sit very very much sort of within the a ALN sort of umbrella" P10</i></p> <p><i>"they do get extra but but but it's more of a form of formalized extra I would suggest there's more there's a more formalised support mechanism around them if they've got a registered barrier" P8</i></p> <p><i>"just to make that alternative pathway viable there has to be you know that pupil might be a bit of a nightmare but they have to have a certain level of sort of skills to be able to actually and responsibility to be able to sort of you know make this make the step out of school into the wide world and sort of on their own onto an alternative pathway that's not that's not a move every pupil can make so yeah we do have so so in terms of that we would have less options for for um an ALN pupil" P10</i></p>
	<p>We can't do this for everyone</p>	<p><i>"the extreme examples that for me are easy um the the kind of like the more mundane examples that's where we are constrained by sort of financial limitations or we can't do radical for everybody because we're a massive big secondary school with 300 pupils in a year group and staffing" P10</i></p> <p><i>"with significant groups of pupils like FSM like I said those pupils do have we have staffing to give those pupils additional support and we have time to be flexible with what that support looks like but there's still you know we are trying to sort of with with financial and with time and capacity limitations we're trying to put interventions into you know for a lot of pupils..." P10</i></p> <p><i>"Traditionally um we can access out of school tuition we can access um... sort of we have used in the past um tuition companies that are paid for so something called Academy 21 we used last year it wasn't particularly successful um but we did use it and pay for it we are currently looking at a ACT which is a vocational college again it's very expensive so you're looking at set something like 17 grand a year for one place for five days a week" P8</i></p> <p><i>"that will be something that we just can't afford soon as we get 3 and ½ for a pupil so we are currently paying.... we're currently paying a chunk of money for one pupil who is on our role but is out of school</i></p>

		<p>tutored and she is attending there one day a week... uh and so she's doing that so that we can get her hair and beauty qualification in year 10 with the idea that we'll keep funding that into year 10 until she gets level 2" P8</p> <p>"we need more money and we need more time and we need more yeah no we're absolutely at the end of our tether and we're... 10 years ago I think we were in a much better place because I think that what's happened is children's psychology of children and you'll know best has changed and I think that... that means that we are now fighting a battle which is much more difficult with the same resources" P8</p> <p>"there's not enough out there and there are too many children I think possibly that are needing more and more... so again the relationship between an LEA and the school is ever more um... ever more tense because the LEAs have got less money and the schools have got less money... and so the LEA's saying "well actually you deal with those there you make this better you make sure that they don't leave NEET" and you're like "well actually we need help with this one" and they're saying "well we can't because we're busy elsewhere" so there's a growing I would say anecdotally there is a growing... um... concern around the number of young people who will be NEET in the next 5 6 years" P8</p> <p>"there's not enough out there and there are too many children I think possibly that are needing more and more..." P8</p> <p>"a general challenge in my role is there's twice as much work that I'm capable of doing and half the amount of time that I need to do it if I had half the amount of work and twice the time twice amount of time then you know that pupil centred approach which we're trying to achieve would be even more achievable so I you know I cannot stress that the time constraints and the financial restraints that schools are under I've been doing this job for well I've been working in this school for 20 plus years and you know the the financial strain strain on school is is in a different ball... we never used to have a business manager um because we never needed one we used to be awash with money um but because of cut back and cut back and sort of erosion of funding um you know if we don't have a business manager to sit on top of our finances we're spiraling into debt before you know it so so there's definitely that pressure the time pressure I used to be able to sit down for lunch um but I'm I'm not exaggerating I I haven't sat down for lunch now for for I don't know 10 years um so this this is the sob story going on now here so but you know it is I I can't stress enough the challenge of being in school these days um and it's it's it is really really hard work" P10</p>
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	<p>Sometimes there's nothing we can do</p>	<p><i>"obviously all the interventions go in and there are pupils whose challenges are are so acute that you know and like really really really really pretty majorly extreme pupil's they are out there and there are some pupils who we certainly do know that this is going to be we are really really up against it you know and I could be talking about um... a LAC pupil who was being permanently excluded from a previous school for something to do with a knife and they come to us and we've tried to to get them engaged them in art with with us and we have some success but then that pupil then sort of retreats to you know not their care home but back to a parent and refused to get out of bed for three months and refuses to speak to anybody who sort of visits the house you know there there are situations like that where where really really really our chance of exceeding success or achieving success are pretty minimal" P10</i></p> <p><i>"I guess us and Careers Wales and whatever other agencies would just carry on trying but there are times when when you know either additional needs challenges are so acute or domestic breakdown is so massive that it doesn't it doesn't happen... but but that that is that is it is really really slim" P10</i></p> <p><i>"if you don't have any barriers you're just gonna live a normal everyday lifestyle that most people do but the more barriers you have in play... means that the more likely going to be NEET and so the more that you will have an evolved set of things that go on" P8</i></p> <p><i>"but you know it's our chance of doing that you know his challenge was so extreme really what chance have we got" P10</i></p> <p><i>"No I mean ((pause)) I I think I think ((pause)) that there are valid reasons for a whole host of people to not achieve and there always has been" P8</i></p> <p><i>"we've had two NEETs in the past 10 years so we've got a good record for it but that doesn't mean that my concern I suppose it's my job to be anxious about all of those children that hopefully will not become NEET but we need to make sure they don't and if I'm a bit paranoid and a little bit more um ((pause)) worried about the growing need for us to look after our NEETs I suppose that's a good thing but I see that there will be a growth in NEETs in the next 5 6 years as a balloon actually and I think that that's shared in educational... arenas elsewhere" P8</i></p>

